

Patlabor: Personal Files

by Desaix

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Summary: Chronicles the time between the end of the series oavs and the start of the second movie...

1. Episode 01: Another Transfer

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
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>
Episode 01: Another Transfer

>
December 28, 1999

>
The entire Special Vehicles company was assembled for the ceremony.

>Gomioka, the guest of honor, sat at the long table in front of the
assembled crowd between his wife and Captain Gotoh. He was having a hard

>time keeping his eyes forward, towards the audience, like he was supposed
to. Instead, he kept looking nervously at the podium, where Captain Nagumo

>was about to make her announcement.

>"...And with the formation of the Third Unit, I am pleased to announce the
promotion of one of my best Labor pilots. Without further ado, let me

>present... CAPTAIN Gomioka!"

>Shinobu stepped back and to her right while gesturing towards the
microphone. Gomioka slowly stood up and walked up to the lectern,

>accidentally brushing by her as she moved to her seat next to Gotoh.
Clearing his throat a little, he waited for the clapping to die down before

>he addressed the assembly.

>"This was... completely unexpected. When I heard that the Special Vehicles
division was forming a third unit, I was certain that I would not be

>selected as its commander- I figured a command car officer or a desk
officer from outside of Special Vehicles would be promoted into the slot.

>I certainly didn't expect I'D be the one to be promoted... But now that I
am, I want to thank those who brought me here- My command car officer,

>Akito Kenichi; my transport driver, Tazaki Hiroaki; and, most especially,
the person who recommended me for the job- Captain Nagumo." He paused for

>the polite applause that followed. "I will do my best to not fail the
trust the Special Vehicles division, and my former captain, has placed in

>me." He winced at his own words, but recovered in order to finish with a
"Thank you" before returning to his seat. He noticed Gotoh looking at him

>oddly when he first mentioned Shinobu, and he still felt the stare of the
unusual commander of Unit Two as he sat down. 'What is his problem, anyway?'

>he wondered, as he whispered something into Shinobu's ear. He saw her nod,
and she stood up and went back to the podium.

>
"That is all for today," she began. "But the members of Unit Two and Akito

>Kenichi are asked to stay behind for a moment. Dismissed."

>The maintenance squad, most of Unit One's personnel, and most of the
guests (including Kanuka Clancy, who had flown back from the states on

>Gomioka's invitation- the two of them had formed a pretty decent friendship
based on mutual admiration of skill and professionalism) stood up and

>walked to the reception area in order to stuff their faces.

Asuma
Shinohara snorted.

>
"Great, now we aren't going to get anything to eat," he muttered to Noa,

>the young redhead sitting to his right, barely relaxing her shoulder into
his.

>
"Maybe it won't take too long," she soothed, despite being slightly annoyed

>herself. It wasn't often they had anything other than fish, tomatoes, or
chinese takeout at the Special Vehicles headquarters.

>
Ohta, sitting behind the two of them, raged. "Will you two think without

>your stomachs for once! This could be serious!"

>Shinohara rolled his eyes. "Relax, Ohta... it's not like I was going to
walk out of this meeting, after all."

>
Noa nodded, frowning. "Besides, it's hard to think when you're hungry."

>
"I'll save some for you all! This looks like business, so I'm going on

>ahead," Tamiko, Shinshi's wife, announced.

>"I'll see you later, honey," Shinshi said, smiling. His smile became
nervous as he realized his wife was waiting for him to do more, and kissed

>her goodbye, blushing fiercely.

>Tamiko immediately became her bouncy and energetic self. "Bye, Miki!" she
exhaulted, hugging him fiercely in return before dashing out to join the

>party.

>"'Bye, Miki,'" Ohta mocked. "What a pathetic display! Police officers
should not be married- it distracts them from their work."

>
Gomioka, hearing Ohta's comments, frowned. His wife, following Shinshi's
>wife out the door, spun around. "Excuse me?!" she screamed. "Do you mean
that my husband should never have married me?!"
>
Ohta backed away from the enraged female. "Uh, no! I mean... uh... sorry,
>Mrs. Gomioka...."

>"Hmph," she snorted angrily, turning to leave. "Well, you should be!"

>Hiromi just looked around nervously during the whole exchange, worried that
another fight was going to break out between Ohta and Shinshi- the last one
>had been over Noa's game of catch, and had resulted in a softball flying
into his chicken cage. Akemi still hadn't recovered her old egg
>production, she had been so scared.

>Akito Kenichi just looked around him, wondering why he had been left with
all these crazy people.
>
Gotoh, who somehow had made it to up to the lectern without anyone else
>noticing, tapped the microphone to get everyones attention. "Um, excuse
me, but I think we should get down to business, and maybe we'll make it out
>of here before the maintenance squad attacks poor Tamiko for hording the
food she promised for us." Everyone quieted down and turned their
>attention to the podium. "With the promotion of Gomioka and the formation
of the new unit, we are forced to re-organize personel in order to provide
>him with at least one veteran team. So, Mr. Kenichi, you are joining your
former pilot. You will report to the Third Unit tommorow. You can go now,
>unless you want to know who your new partners will be." Akito looked
longingly at the door, but decided he'd wait at least until he knew who his
>new Labor pilot would be. "We'll promote Tazaki to take your place in the
first unit, and add a rookie pilot and driver to replace him and Gomioka.
>Now, as far as Unit 2 is concerned... one pilot and one driver will be
leaving my unit to join Unit 3."
>
The low chatter that had been going on since Gotoh had started talking
>ceased, and everyone looked at him with widening eyes, waiting for him to
continue.
>
Kumagami stepped forward and turned around to face the rest of the unit.
>"This was a hard choice, but it was for the best. I felt as if Shinohara
had better chemistry with his team, and I also believe I would be better at
>adapting rookies to the Special Vehicles division, so... Ohta, Shinshi... I
enjoyed the time we've had together, but I am afraid that I volunteered you
>to the Third Unit."

>Shinshi made a face. "You mean I'm being transferred but I STILL have to
put up with this marraige-hater? Ugh!"
>
Ohta looked stricken- not at Shinshi's words, but at Kumagami's

>announcement. Slowly, he stood and turned to leave the room.

>"Hey, Ohta- you were not dismissed!" Gomioka snapped.

>He spun around and looked Gomioka straight in the eye. "With all
due
respects, SIR, I am still a member of Unit 2 until tomorrow-
and unless one
>of my superiors from that unit orders me to stay, I am leaving.
Goodbye."
With that, he slowly marched out of the doors into the
parking lot, not even
>bothering to spare a glance at the door leading to the reception.

Everyone's eyes followed him in shock.
>
"What's wrong with Ohta?" Noa asked, voicing the question that
no-one else
>was willing to ask.

>Shinohara grimaced, looking around. "Come on," he said, tugging
her
shoulder to indicate she should follow him.
>
* * * * *
>
A bus pulled to a stop outside of the small plot of reclaimed
land that
>served as Special Vehicle's headquarters. Seven people stepped out
and
looked around in wonder.
>
"We have to work in this hell-hole from now on?" a disagreeable
young man
>with a mop of hair on his head groaned.

>Another young man who's nose looked like it had been broken about a
dozen
times snorted. "Shut up, Mashimo. You've done nothing but
complain since
>we went to labor training."

>"You shut up too, Seiroku!" Mashimo shouted. "You've been
complaining just
as much!"
>
"Yes, but I've been justified!" Seiroku replied.
>
"Um, excuse me," a cute female voice broke in. "Can you two
please settle
>this argument inside? It's cold out here, and I don't want to be
late."

>The two arguing men looked at her at the same time. She had curly
hair
which made her even more cute than she already was as her
wide eyes looked
>down her button nose imploringly.

>"Um... right," they both said at once, glaring at each other once
more
before turning and leading the rest of them into the large
warehouse-like
>building down the road in front of them.

>* * * * *

>"Ohta?" Noa began cautiously, Shinohara standing behind her. The
other
labor pilot didn't move a muscle when she called his name.
"Ohta, what's
>wrong?"

>"Yeah, Ohta... Normally, you couldn't be happier if you got
promoted,"
Shinohara commented.
>
"Promoted?" Ohta replied hoarsely. "What do you mean,
'promoted?'"
>
"Your transfer means you'll be the senior labor pilot," Asuma
noted.
>
Ohta turned to face them and laughed sadly. For the first time,
the two
>who had come to check up on him saw the bottle of sake he was
cradling in
his lap, almost empty. "Oh, really? Shinohara, you, of
all people, should
>know that isn't true. You were with me when we left Unit 1." Ohta
took
the last swig of his bottle before continuing. "They said the
exact same
>thing- that the transfer was not a punishment, despite what they

said about
the other team working better together, but a promotion- I'd be the senior labor pilot in Captain Gotoh's squadron- I'd have command of labor one, after all!" He snorted. "That lasted all of two weeks. When the new labors arrived, along with your girlfriend over there, guess where I was again? Back in labor number two, and a rookie was made senior over me!"

Sighing, he leaned back. "This is just like the last time- I'm being moved into the new unit because the other team works better together, but I'm not supposed to worry because I'll be the senior labor pilot. Sorry, I don't believe that- I think you all are just trying to get rid of me!"

Noa blushed. 'Girlfriend?' she asked herself. Looking at her partner, she couldn't tell for herself if it was true or not. They seemed to do just about everything together, and they were very comfortable together- there had been times when they were so relaxed sitting back to back that one or the other of them would just fall asleep. She also remembered one vacation right before a civil war had broken out- she had been wondering if piloting Alphonse was enough of a reason to stay in the Special Vehicles division and risk her life on a near daily basis. Then Asuma had called, asking if she wanted to get together and do something, and she was so excited that he'd called... she knew then that he, too, was part of why she stayed in the SV2. She smiled, remembering how she knew her father was jealous of her for having someone like Shinohara nearby all of the time. Then that war made her put aside all the thoughts she'd had in that little time they'd spent together. So she knew he meant something to her... still, he seemed to act as little more than what he said- a friend- and he always seemed to be more interested in Kanuka than anyone else. But did he? What was all of that about a pilot and command car needing to function as 'two in one?' And did she think of him as more than a friend herself?

Shinohara, however, had missed that little accusation about his relationship with Noa. He was thinking too much about the rest of what Ohta had said. "Get rid of you? Ohta, is that what you think we want? You're our friend! We might sometimes think you're a bit uptight, or that you're too obsessed with guns, but we certainly don't want you gone!"

"Oh?!" Ohta shouted accusingly. "Prove it to me! Help me stay with the Second unit!"

"How?" Asuma asked.

"I... I don't know..." Ohta admitted, breaking down.

Asuma thought about it for a second. "Well, I don't think I can do that... but there might be something else I can do. Noa!"

Noa blinked, looking at him in surprise. While wondering if she was his girlfriend, she had forgotten he was standing right there- in

fact, she
>forgot why they were there.

>"Um, uh... Yes, Asuma?"

>"Come on, we've got to talk to Captain Gomioka."

>"Uh, right... coming, Asuma."

>* * * * *

>The seven people who had left the bus stood at attention in front
of
Special Vehicle's three captains. Gomioka and Shinobu were
inspecting the
>uniforms of the assembled people, while Gotoh sat with his feet on
his
desk, casually looking at the new recruits from his chair.

>
"Name?" Gomioka asked.
>
"Joudo Ishikawa, sir," a short, thin, balding man answered.
Despite having
>lost some hair, he appeared to be in his mid-twenties.

>"Name?"

>"Yamane Seiroku," the man with a broken nose spat out.

>"Name?"

>"Natsume Kawai, sir," the cute young girl who had been cold
replied.

>"Name?"

>"Kenji Iguchi, sir," a nondescript man shrugged. He doubted anyone
would
remember his name in the morning.
>
"Name?"
>
"Yoshi Tobe, sir," a man who's looks would be pleasant if it
weren't for a
>scar over his left eye.

>"Name?"

>"Koichi Miyagi, SIR!" came the enthusiastic response of a man with
a
friendly looking smile.
>
"Name?"
>
"Ueki Mashimo," the disagreeable mop-haired man said, yawning.

>
Gomioka and Shinobu finished their inspection and stepped out
from the new
>recruits and nodded to them. "Well, it is too late to do much more
today.
Tomorrow, we will divide you among the various units and
you can begin
>learning your duties," Shinobu announced. "There are three slots in
Unit 3
with Captain Gomioka, and two slots each in Units 1 and 2,
commanded by
>Captain Gotoh and myself. I suggest you settle down into your
quarters and
get some rest- tomorrow will be a big day for all of
you. Dismissed."
>
The rookies shuffled out of the room slowly, mumbling to
themselves.
>
"Well, what do you think?" Shinobu asked both Gomioka and Gotoh.

>
"A typical bunch of rookies- you have some troublemakers, some
>exceptionally well disciplined people, and a few people who are
harmless
but probably not very good policemen," Gotoh considered.
"But we'll know
>more tomorrow."

>"Uh..." Gomioka muttered, not sure of how to proceed. "Well, I've
never
had to worry about this sort of thing before, but... I think
they'll do all

>right." In truth, he thought Gotoh's assessment was pretty accurate, but
he needed to say something.
>
Before anyone could continue, a knocking erupted from the office door.
>"Come in!" Gotoh called.

>Shinohara and Noa burst into the door. "Well, we found out why Ohta was so
upset."
>
The three captains looked at one another and blinked. "Well?" Shinobu
>prompted, curious despite not being involved in the whole situation.

>"Captain Gomioka, do you remember when he was the junior labor pilot in
Unit 1?" Shinohara asked. Gomioka nodded, and he continued.
"Well, do
>you remember what we all told him when he and I were transferred to form
the nucleus of Unit 2?"
>
"No..." the captain replied, thinking. "Can't say I do."

>
"Well, we told him that he was being transferred because the senior labor
>crew had better chemistry, but he that he wasn't being punished- he was
being promoted to the senior labor pilot of the second unit. When Noa
>arrived, however, she was made the senior pilot despite his greater
experience. He believes we are doing the same thing again."
>
Gotoh's eyes widened as he heard this. "And why did no-one tell me he was
>promised this when they transferred him to my command?"

>Shinobu looked embarrassed. "Er... my apologies... I didn't even think
about it."
>
Gomioka frowned. "So what does this mean?"
>
Shinohara bit his lower lip. "Captain Gomioka, do you think you make
>certain that there is no competition for senior labor pilot in the third
unit- that you assign that position to Ohta irregardless of how the rookies
>do?"

>The new captain had no clue how to handle that request. He knew from their
days together that Ohta was a reckless, overbearing man who was obsessed
>over the labor's firearms, and it would probably be irresponsible to
promise such a position to a man like that. But... he looked up into
>Shinobu's eyes, and saw the guilt she felt over the situation. She had
made a promise, and had forgotten about it- and that caused the current
>mess. He could not just do nothing for her when he had a choice.

>"Very well, Mr. Shinohara," he said, nodding to the young man. "Go and
tell him that he cannot be displaced as senior pilot because of the
>rookies' contest tomorrow."

>* * * * *

>"I'm... sorry for having said what I did, Shinohara," Ohta said, walking
with Asuma and Noa towards the reception area. They had all given up hope
>of getting any food, but at least they could join in on the fun and
entertainment before it was over. "I do not really believe you

were trying
>to get rid of me- I was just..."

>"Relax- I know you were upset, but don't worry about it. Captain Gomioka
promised me that he would not let the same thing happen to you this time.
>Now, come on and have some fun- this is your last day with Unit 2. Enjoy
it with us."
>
They entered the party, already in progress. Tamiko, dragging her husband
>behind her, immediately ran up to them. "There you three are!" she
effervesced. "I've barely been able to keep these for you!" With that,
>she turned to her husband and took three plates full of food from him,
handing them to Noa, Asuma, and Ohta in a flash. "Come on, eat up! Enjoy
>yourself!" With that, she returned to the center of the party, mingling
with the other party-goers. Music was playing and people were dancing in
>one corner of the room, and Noa grabbed Shinohara off so that they could
get in a dance or two when they finished their food (not that she had
>decided that she was his girlfriend or anything, she reminded herself, but
they DID do this sort of thing together every now and then). Ohta looked
>dumbstruck, however, as Kumagami and Kanuka broke off dancing (much to the
annoyance of the men in the room, as there were only a half dozen women to
>dance with, three of them (Tamiko, Gomioka's wife, and Noa) appeared
attached while a fourth (Gotoh's niece) was a bit too young) and, joined
>by Hiromi, approached him.

>"Ohta, I'm glad to see you are feeling better," Hiromi said, putting one of
his giant hands on the other man's shoulder. "I will miss having you as a
>part of our family here in the Second Unit, but you are always welcome to a
tomato when I pick them!"
>
"I'm sorry to force you out when you obviously did not want to go,"
>Kumagami comforted, also placing her hand on Ohta's shoulder. "I think,
however, that your experience will serve the Third Unit greatly."
>
Kanuka smiled slyly at Ohta. "I don't particularly care if you leave the
>second unit or not, Ohta." She turned and started to walk away. Looking
over her shoulder, she continued, "After all, that means I'll have an
>excuse to start shaping up another one of these shoddy Japanese Patlabor
units..."
>
Ohta smiled, a few small tears forming in the corners of his eyes. No,
>Unit Two was not trying to get rid of him. Making a mental note to try and
keep in touch with everyone, he walked with them into the middle of the
>party.

>-----
Episode 1 Closing Notes:
>Don't worry about the new characters taking over- they're mostly extras,
with one or two protagonists thrown in. And don't worry about me ignoring
>any of the main characters- I plan on dealing with all THREE units about
evenly.

>
Next Episode:
>The new recruits get transferred to the various units, and Kanuka visits
her grandmother.

>-----
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2. Episode 02: The Tournament

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 02: The Tournament

>
December 29, 1999

>
Takeo Kumagami stood before the captains' office, report in hand. She made

>three quick raps, and waited. "Enter!" Gomioka's voice echoed through the
door. She stepped in and looked around. Gomioka was the only person in

>the room, busily putting files into the drawer of his new desk.

>"Where's Captain Gotoh?" she asked.

>"Outside with Captain Nagumo," he sighed, grimacing. "They're getting
everything prepared for the placement tournament today. We got the

>training labors ready this morning for the combat to be held in, but they
still need to get the awning set up for the tournament's spectators, and

>didn't want to wait for everyone else to wake up."

>"You don't seem too happy about it," Kumagami observed, smiling slightly.

>"Huh?" He blinked, only just realizing he had been frowning. "Oh, I'm
just annoyed that I can't join them. Too much to do in order to set up the

>new unit."

>"Oh? Do you want me to help you out?"

>Gomioka considered her for a moment. "Perhaps you can. When they offered
you the command, did you think of things like what type of labors you would

>request, or whether you would want two four-hour shifts a day or one
eight-hour shift, should you be given that option? Or what sort of basic

>rules you would establish?"

>"Hmm..." Kumagami considered. "No, I was too busy trying to decide if I
wanted to take the job or not, but I can probably help you at least with

>the labor question. I'd order two Ingrams and one Peacemaker."

>"You would? Why?"

>She smiled. "Well, I've hung around Shinohara a bit, and he seems to know
quite a bit about the technical details of our labors. I've heard him

>explain it before. It's like making a choice between a manual or an
automatic car- a manual transmission has much better handling and works

>much smoother than an automatic, IF you're familiar with it, though
an
automatic is easier to use, regardless. The Ingram is like a
manual,
>whereas the Zero is like an automatic. Given that the Academy still
only
has the Ingram trainers, I'd say the cadets will probably
know the controls
>well enough to put it to good effect."

>Gomioka nodded. "Makes sense... but then why get the
Peacemaker?"

>Kumagami shrugged. "It doesn't happen very often, but occasionally
the
second unit has needed to use all three labors in its
operations. If your
>team ever encounters a similar situation, one of the command car
officers
would need to pilot it, and since they rarely get time
inside of a labor
>unless the unit is having a refresher course at the Academy, it
would be
better for them to get one which would work pretty good
whether you're
>familiar with the controls or not."

>Gomioka nodded. "I think I'll take your suggestion," he said,
writing down
something on a form in front of him. "Too bad I can't
make this order
>until the factory re-opens on the second. It's already supposed to
be
three weeks at the earliest before they'll be able to send me
the new
>labors, and until they do my unit will have to use the old 97's we
had
mothballed from before the Zeros showed up." He sighed. "So,
any chance
>you can help me with my other problems?"

>She smiled, walking over to Gotoh's desk and setting her report on
his
chair for when he got back. "Sorry, but I've got other things
to take care
>of. I'm supposed to give the pre-tournament lecture to the cadets in
five
minutes, so I've got to get going. I'd suggest you ask
Shinobu for advice,
>however. Don't ask Gotoh, though- while he's a good captain, his
methods
are... unconventional, and probably wouldn't work for
you."
>
"Ask... Captain Nagumo... for advice. Yes, that sounds like a
good idea.
>Thank you, Luitenant Kumagami."

>"Any time, Captain Gomioka..."

>* * * * *

>"Are you sure you don't want to stick around and see the
tournament,
Kanuka? It seems a shame for you to do all this work
and not at least see
>how things turn out," Shinohara urged. He, Noa, and Kanuka Clancy
had
joined Gotoh and Shinobu nearly a half-hour beforehand, and
were helping
>them set up the folding chairs.

>"I'm only in Tokyo for a few days, this time," Clancy replied. "I
should
really visit my grandmother while I'm here, but if I stay
for the
>tournament..."

>"You won't have any time for her," Noa finished. She looked over at
Asuma
briefly, her stomach clenching. 'Why does he want her to
stay, anyway?'
>She couldn't forget Ohta's drunken proclamation of her being
Shinohara's
girlfriend, and the thought that he might like Kanuka
better than her- or

>worse, that he might want both her and Kanuka to be a sort of harem
for
him- troubled her. She still wasn't sure she regarded him as
her
>boyfriend, though, so why should she be so upset?

>"Hey, Noa," Shinohara began, attracting her attention. "Is
something
wrong? You look like you've got another toothache!"

>
"Huh?" Noa asked, startled. "Oh, no, I was just thinking about

>something..."

>"Good. You were unbearable the last time," Asuma grinned before
turning
back to his work.
>
"So who's going to be the guest participant, now that I'm
unavailable?"
>Kanuka asked.

>"Huh?" both Izumi and Shinohara asked.

>"Captain Gotoh asked me to participate in the tournament as the
experienced
guest, like Gomioka did when we had our tournament. I
assumed that, since
>I wasn't able to do it, he'd have asked someone else..."

>"I did," Gotoh said, surprising them all as he slipped in behind
them.

>"Who?" Noa asked, curious.

>"Officer Ohta. I've told him he's not allowed to use his gun...
supposedly
to give him a handicap against the rookies."

>
Shinohara smirked. "That might make him a good test, if he
listens."
>
"If he doesn't, he's going to have problems- we've taken the gun
out of his
>training labor," Gotoh commented. "Say, Kanuka, shouldn't you be
heading
to your grandmothers shortly? You told me you'd promised
to fix her
>lunch."

>As he spoke, Kanuka's watch started beeping. "Perfect timing,
captain.
I've got to go."
>
"Are we going to see you again before you go, Kanuka?" Shinohara
asked.
>Noa's stomach clenched again.

>"No, I don't believe so," Clancy answered. Her eyes flashed towards
Noa.
"You might not have a toothache, but something's sure
bothering you...
>maybe you should rest for a bit."

>"Uh, maybe," she answered noncommittally.

>* * * * *

>"First match," Shinobu announced. "Kenji Iguchi vs. Yoshi Tobe."

>"Bow!" Gomioka, officiating the tournament, called to the two
labors
through his megaphone. When both rose to their full height,
he waved the
>flag he was holding signaling the start of the match.

>Yoshi's labor charged in, throwing a punch as it reached within an
arm's
length of Kenji's, but he misjudged the range and missed by
inches.
>Kenji's own labor stepped forwards, delivering a punch of its own.
Yoshi
raised his labor's arms to protect his face, but the blow
landed in the
>breast-plate, knocking him off-balance. The labor waved its
arms
frantically in a desperate attempt to remain upright, but
only succeeded in

>looking foolish and dismembering itself as it fell.

>"Enough!" Gomioka cried, waving the flag again to indicate the end of the
match. "Winner, Kenji Iguchi!"
>
"Pathetic," one of the higher-ranking visitors in the seats muttered. Most
>of the other observers agreed with the sentiment.

>Shige looked over the damaged labor as the maintenance squad carried off
its remains. "Sheesh... this will take a week to fix, at least."
>
Yoshi Tobe, his face flaming enough to make his scar look even more
>pronounced, walked over to the stands. "I didn't think I'd do THAT
badly..." he said apologetically.
>
Gomioka grimaced the moment Tobe couldn't see him. He knew Yoshi would
>wind up in his unit before the day was over, after a performance like that.
'First Ohta, now this... am I going to have a unit
>staffed entirely by
>incompetents?'

>* * * * *

>"Next match, Ueki Mashimo vs. Yamane Seiroku," Gotoh called. Shinobu was
inside reviewing the tape of the first fight, and when Ueki and Yamane were
>done he would switch with her and review the tape of this match.

>"Hopefully, this will be better than the last fight," Shinohara commented.
The others of Unit Two around him could only nod in agreement.
>
"WELL!" the mop-haired Mashimo called out to Seiroku as the later's labor
>joined his on the battlefield. "Looks like we can have this out once and
for all!"
>
"That we can," Yamane answered calmly. "That we can."

>
"BOW!" Gomioka's voice cried out. The flag came down, and the battle was
>joined.

>It was, indeed, a better fight than the last. Mashimo launched a furious
offensive, striking out repeatedly with his
>electromagnetic baton like a
>katana. Seiroku coolly blocked with his own, waiting to his opponent to
finish blowing off steam. When the attacks slowed, he struck.

>
With one strike, the hand Mashimo's labor was wielding the baton with lay
>on the ground. With another, the legs were cut out from under him, and the
match was over.
>
"Winner, Yamane Seiroku!" Gomioka called.
>
"Wow..." Noa, sitting in the third row back, breathed.

>
"Impressive," Shinohara, sitting next to her, agreed. "But I think their
>rivalry might have let them learn how to fight each other better than they
would fight someone else. In a real fight, I'm not sure Yamane would have
>known when to counterattack."

>"You think so? Still, it was an impressive battle," Takeo, listening in
from behind them, commented.
>
Before they could say anymore, Gotoh passed in front of them, holding the

>tape of the fight in his right hand.

>"Kumagami, could you take over for me?" he asked. "Shinobu isn't finished
reviewing the tape of the first fight yet, and we need someone to announce
>the fights and keep an eye on the recording equipment."

>"Yes, sir," Kumagami acknowledged. Smiling as Gotoh left, she turned to
Noa and Asuma. "Do you two want to join me up front? You might be able to
>get a better view of the fight from up close..."

>"Yeah... I'm tired of having to crane my neck to see over everyone's head,"
Shinohara answered for the both of them. Noa was a little uncertain she
>wanted Asuma to speak for her, like always, but decided to go along with
him anyway- so far, he'd never made her do something she hadn't wanted
>eventually wanted to do, anyway. Perhaps he just knew her that well- the
thought seemed to warm her a bit. If she was his girlfriend, at least he
>understood her. Maybe.

>They made their way to the front table, and Takeo set the video camera up
to record the fight. Shinohara and Noa sat at the end of the table, almost
>to the right of most of the rest of the seats, and chatted a little while
the labors got into position.
>
"The next match," Kumagami announced, "Is Joudo Ishikawa vs. Natsume
>Kawai."

>Natsume looked very nervous sitting in her labor, waiting for the fight to
begin. Being nervous made her tremble, and trembling made her look even
>cuter than usual. Being cuter than usual caught Asuma's attention.

>Noa growled a little when she notice Shinohara ogling the young girl, and
got out of her seat and walked away from him, standing outside of the
>awning that was covering the spectator area.

>* * * * *

>"Now that's odd," Gotoh said, reviewing the tape of Yamane and Ueki's
battle. "The hand came off almost too easily." He punched the intercom
>button. "Mr. Sakaki?"

>"Yes?" his hoarse voice rumbled back.

>"Can you make a close inspection of the hand joint for Officer Mashimo's
labor? Something about the way it fell off looks funny."

>
"I already did," Sakaki's voice replied. "Training needs a better
>maintenance squad. The bolt holding that hand on it was rusted through,
and was only supported by the wires that controlled the fingers. It was
>amazing it stayed on as long as it did."

>"Hmm..." Gotoh said. "So no foul play involved, but Officer Seiroku had an
unfair advantage which may have effected the outcome. I'll note that."
>
* * * * *
>
The flag came down, and again a pair of labors faced off against each
>other. Natsume, despite her nerves, put up a decent fight, but it was
obvious after the first minute that she was overmatched- she had already

>lost her baton and was on the retreat. In desperation, she drew her gun,
before being knocked onto her side.
>
Asuma caught sight of the trigger-finger moving, and leapt to his feet. It
>wasn't aimed at him, but he saw who it was aimed for and made his move.

>"NOA, LOOK OUT!"

>"Eh?" Noa asked, in shock. All she could think of was that silly lesson
Gotoh and Shinobu tried to give to Unit 2 when they went for retraining,
>where he tried to convince Ohta of the dangers of using his gun too much by
faking an accident with a training gun, and how closely this resembled it.
>She was startled back into reality when she felt herself bodily shoved
aside, landing several feet out of the path of the paint cartridge as it
>flew passed the audience and into the building behind them.

>Shinohara stood up painfully. "Are you okay?" he asked, pulling Noa to her
feet.
>
"I... I think so..." Noa answered, dazed. 'He risked his life for me?' she
>wondered.

>* * * * *

>It took a full half hour for order to be restored after the gun accident.
Asuma took Noa back into the compound with the intention of getting her a
>drink to calm down, and Natsume had to be taken off by the medics-she
wouldn't have squeezed the trigger is a piece of wire jarred loose by the
>fall hadn't jabbed her in the arm, forcing her hand to clench. Some of the
guests went home, but most had stayed and were waiting for the tournament
>to resume. The maintenance crew cleared the field, taking the damaged
labor back into the shed for inspection, and the final match of the first
>round was ready to begin.

>"Next match, Ohta Isao vs. Koichi Miyagi," Shinobu called. Gotoh still had
to finish reviewing the tape he'd been working on, and then would have to
>watch the Joudo\Natsume fight as well.

>"Bow." The two labors bowed, and then the fight began.

>The fight was even matched for a long time. When Ohta attacked, Koichi
dodged. When Koichi attack, Ohta blocked. Both occasionally went for the
>kill, but neither delivered a decisive blow. The battle lasted for several
hours, but soon the two labors were both in trouble.

>
Ohta was the first to notice the problem. His labor's main monitor went
>black, and began blinking 'Low Battery' in big red letters. He cursed. He
was out of time.
>
Koichi's battery started failing less than a minute later, but he was
>lucky. By that time, Ohta's power was gone. The match was over.

>"Winner, Koichi!"

>Ohta growled. 'Not again!'
>* * * * *

>"I'm home, grandma!" Kanuka called.

>"Hello, Kanuka," a hoarse female voice answered.

>"Grandma, are you okay? You sound horrible!" Kanuka exclaimed.

>"Oh, it's just a cold... don't mind me," her grandmother said, coughing a
little. "How are things?"
>
"Well, I was promised a raise and possibly a promotion in a few months. My
>partner in New York, Leslie Desaix, recently found out that his sister is
pregnant... Special vehicles is gaining some new officers. But I'm only
>here for a few days, and wanted to visit, not talk about my job. Is your
cold too bad to go out with?"
>
Kanuka's grandmother looked at her granddaughter with a sad smile. "Well,
>maybe. I'm feeling a little weak, but I think if I bundle up I'll be fine,
if you want to go out to dinner."
>
"I'll get your coat," Kanuka said.
>
As she walked out of eyeshot, her grandmother took out the report the
>doctor had given her and hid it underneath the seat cushion. 'I can't tell
you yet, granddaughter... Maybe when you aren't able to come back and take
>care of me, but if I told you now you'd fuss over me so much and all you
would try to do would just aggravate my condition... No, I can't tell you
>yet...'
>* * * * *

>"Hey, Noa, you okay?" Asuma asked, a note of concern in his voice.

>Noa just sat next to him, a few feet away from Alphonse, staring off into
space. Shinohara repeated himself, trying to get her to snap out of her
>shock. Slowly, she turned her head towards him, her eyes unblinking.

"Why?"
>
Asuma looked confused. "Why what?"
>
"You could have been killed saving me. Why did you do it?"

>
Shinohara shifted uncomfortably. "Well, a backup and forward have to look
>out for each other, you know?" He smiled nervously. "Besides, who else
would let me order them around so much?"
>
"Asuma, do y-" Noa began.
>
Ohta stormed in, a long line of curses following him. "Low batteries! I
>lost because of some stupid BATTERIES!"

>The moment, such as it was, was ruined. They turned towards Ohta in
surprise. "What are you talking about?" Shinohara asked.

>
"The tournament! We were tied, but then I lost because I ran out of
>power!"

>Noa and Asuma looked at each other in confusion. "Uh... that's not bad,
actually," Shinohara soothed.
>
"What do you mean?" Ohta snapped. "I lost- they're going to put me in the
>second labor again!"

>"No they won't!" Asuma snapped back. "Gomioka didn't lose his spot as
first labor pilot- in Unit 1, I might add- when he lost in our tournament.
>In fact, you were fighting at a disadvantage, remember?"

>"Well, maybe," Ohta growled. He still wasn't happy, but then again he was
rarely happy unless he could work with his guns. "We'll see what he does,"
>he continued, turning and stomping off back to his room.

>"I guess Ohta's still not over his sudden transfer," Noa commented.

>"Guess not," Shinohara agreed. Then he smiled and turned back to her.
"So, what was it you were going to ask me before we were so rudely
>interrupted?"

>"Oh, uh..." Noa wasn't sure what to say. She was going to ask him how he
really felt about her, but it didn't feel right to talk about that right
>now. The mood was gone. "I was going to ask... if you wanted to go out
for a drink next time we're off duty- my treat-a way of saying thanks."
>
Asuma noticed her hesitation. It was almost like she wasn't going to ask
>him that originally... but he figured she could hide whatever it was from
him if she wanted. Besides, he wasn't one to pass up a free drink. "Sure
>thing..."

>* * * * *

>"Second round, first match! Yamane Seiroku vs. Koichi Miyagi!" Gotoh's
voice called out. He was finally back from reviewing the tapes, and
>Shinobu had taken his place in the video room.

>"Bow!" The flag came down again, signaling the start of the next set of
fights. The battle was short and violent- both labors started

>disassembling each other. Seiroku slapped off a chest plate, and in return
lost an arm at the elbow. The good arm pulled Koichi's labor into his
>knee, but then the leg said knee was connected to disappeared as an
electromagnetic baton was stabbed into it and violently ripped out.
>Keeping its balance only from it's one good arm, Seiroku directed his labor
to one last attempt for victory- his free elbow descended upon the
>sensitive head of his opponent- but didn't do enough damage to finish off
Miyagi- it lacked the added mass the forearm would have provided. A few
>seconds later, Yamane's labor dropped.

>"Winner, Koichi Miyagi!"

>The two former combatants stepped out of their labors and met at the
sidelines while the wrecks they had left behind were carted away.
>
"Impressive win... Koichi, was it?" Seiroku began.
>
"Thank you, Mr..." Miyagi answered.
>
"Seiroku. Yamane Seiroku. Call me Yamane," he smiled. "If you do that
>well in the final round, you're certain to win the First Unit slot. Would
you mind talking a bit about the tactics you used there? I don't remember
>seeing a labor move like that before."

>"Well..." Miyagi considered, then smiled. "Sure thing- come on, lets sit
over there so the next match doesn't disturb us..."
>
* * * * *
>
The final match of the round was already in progress by the time

Noa and

>Asuma returned to the field. Joudo Ishikawa and Kenji Iguchi were fighting
>fairly evenly, though every now and then one labor would score a point on

>the other. It was getting late into the evening, and several of the
>observers had already gone home. One person who left once already, though,

>had returned.

>"Ms... Ms. Izumi?" Natsume Kawai began, after walking over to join her. "I
>want to apologize- it was clumsy of me to be holding on to the gun like

>that when I fell- I should have let go... I could have killed you..."

>"That's right- you could have," Shinohara growled. "Be more careful in the
>future!"

>
"ASUMA!" Noa berated, turning to glare at him. He didn't normally snap at

>cute girls like that- well, actually, maybe he did. After all, didn't he
>basically order her around all the time? Still, he almost made it seem

>like a game to her- she'd realized that when he'd been visiting her at her
>parents home over the family liquor store one time. Looking at him, she

>could tell he was sincerely angry at the young girl. Almost like he was
>when Ohta's obsession with firearms got them in trouble, only a bit more

>serious than that.

>"I'm so sorry..." Natsume groveled, almost in tears.

>"Oh, that's okay," Noa soothed, warning Asuma not to say anything else with
>a glare. "It was just an accident- if you hadn't been hurt, the gun never

>would have gone off. And I wasn't hurt myself, so don't worry about it."

>"Really?" Kawai sniffed, still looking awfully apologetic.

>"Really."

>Further conversation was cut off by a loud crash as Joudo Ishikawa sent
>Kenji Iguchi's labor tumbling. Another match was over, and the effects of

>a previous one were healed.

>* * * * *

>"The final match," Gotoh announced, Shinobu on hand. "Is postponed on
>account of darkness."

>
"What?" "Postponed?" "But labor battles have been fought at night

>before!" "Darkness?" "What's going on!" came various cries from the
>remaining spectators. Joudo Ishikawa and Koichi Miyagi looked at each

>other curiously.

>"Yes, the battle COULD still be fought, if we wanted it to be," Shinobu
>began, backing Gotoh up. "But it won't- our video equipment isn't

>sophisticated enough to record the match in enough detail."

>"Then who's in which unit?" Ueki Mashimo's voice echoed from somewhere in
>the midst of the crowd that had started to converge on the three captains

>who had made the decision.

>"I'm afraid that will have to wait until the tournament is over," Gotoh
>answered. Groans were heard, and people seemed exceedingly

disappointed.

>Joudo looked over at Koichi and whispered something in his ear. A few nods
later, the two recruits approached the captains with a request.

>
"Sirs," Ishikawa began. "Koichi and I have talked, and in the interest of

>speeding up our assignments, we'd like to call off the last match, consider
it a draw, and decide who won the tournament by a coin toss."

>
"Yeah, I analyzed his style from that first match," Miyagi added in

>support. "And I think we're about an even match. A coin toss is all
that's needed."

>
Gotoh looked at Shinobu. "What do you think?" he asked.

>
"I don't know," she considered. "This is a highly irregular request, but

>then again postponing the last match to the next day is also pretty
unusual..."

>
Gotoh nodded. "Yeah. I think we should allow them to decide it by coin

>toss." He searched through his pockets. "Except I don't seem to have any
coins... anyone got change for a hundred-yen note?" he asked, holding up

>the bill.

>"Here," Gomioka supplied, holding out a few coins. "Use one of these."

>Joudo picked up the coin. "Call it in the air," he said, and tossed it.

>"Heads!" Koichi cried.

>Gotoh picked up the coin and looked at it closely. "Heads it is. Koichi,
you've just won the tournament. Congrats!" He looked over at the other

>two captains. "We'll retire to the office for a while, and we'll post the
positions in a couple hours. Hold on, people- we'll be done shortly."

>
* * * * *

>
"This is fabulous food, don't you think, Grandma?" Kanuka asked.

>
Her grandmother nodded. "Yes it is, child. But it's not as good as some

>of your home cooking."

>"Oh, quit trying to compliment me. I'm an excellent cop, but as a cook I'm
only slightly above average."

>
"I think you underestimate yourself, granddaughter, but I won't push the

>point. You can be very stubborn when you want to be."

>The two of them ate on in silence for a few minutes. Kanuka's grandmother
smiled and looked up at her. "So, have you found anyone special yet? Is

>there a chance I might become a great-grandmother?"

>"Grandma!" Kanuka blushed. It took her a few seconds to recover from the
question before shaking her head. "No, grandma, no-one yet. One of the

>Special Vehicles cops I work with, Asuma Shinohara- I think you remember
him- and I have flirted with each other off and on, but nothing serious has

>happened, and I don't really think anything will happen with him.

I'm
pretty sure he's too hung-up on his partner for him to get too

deeply
>involved with anyone else." She chuckled. "Though considering how she
>seems to love her Patlabor, I wouldn't be surprised if he
never makes a
>move on her, either."

>"What do you mean, 'love her Patlabor?' Tell me more about them-
they
sound like an interesting pair," her grandmother asked.
Kanuka went in to
>a long-winded explanation of Noa Izumi and her labor Alphonse, and
how she
seemed to take better care of her labor than she could
herself. Little
>bits about how Asuma seemed to deal with her floated in every now
and then-
how he would both order her around and basically control
her and yet allow
>himself to be roped into doing things like cleaning Alphonse from
head to
toe. Eventually, Kanuka's grandmother started fading away.

>
It wasn't until her grandmother nearly slumped into her food
that Kanuka
>realized something was seriously wrong. "Grandma, are you okay?
What's
wrong?"
>
"Oh, don't worry too much about me, child. I guess the cold I
had was
>worse than I thought," she answered faintly. "And I'm probably not
able to
deal with it as well as I used to be able to deal with
colds- I am over
>seventy years old, after all. Maybe you should take me home."

>Kanuka hailed a waiter and paid for the food. She grabbing a doggy
bag and
helped her grandmother home, wrapping an arm around her to
support her.
>When they finally got to the apartment, she dropped her grandmother
off
into bed and covered her warmly in the blankets. She stuffed
the food into
>the refrigerator and sat down.

>'That's funny,' Kanuka thought. 'Sounds like I sat on some
papers...'
Searching underneath the cushion, she encounters a
folder full of paper and
>pulls it out.

>"What's this? A medical report?" she says, opening it and starting
to
read.
>
'No!' she cried out to herself. 'It can't be! Why didn't she
tell me!'
>
* * * * *
>
Soon, a printout was posted onto the door of the Captains'
Office.
>
"To the new recruits of the Special Vehicles, Section 2-
>As of tomorrow at 0600 hrs, you are to report to the following
assignments:

>Koichi Miyagi- Unit 1 (Labor Pilot, Labor 2)
Joudo Ishikawa- Unit
2 (Labor Pilot, Labor 2)
>Kenji Iguchi- Unit 3 (Labor Pilot, Labor 2)

>Yamane Seiroku- Unit 3 (Command Car, Labor 2)

>Ueki Mashimo- Unit 1 (Transport Driver, Labor 2)
Natsume Kawai-
Unit 2 (Transport Driver, Labor 2)
>Yoshi Tobe- Unit 3 (Transport Driver, Labor 2)

>That is all."

>-----
Next Episode: The recruits meet up
with their units, Kanuka confronts her
>grandmother about the medical report, and Yamane Seiroku approaches

Gomioka
with a request he's not sure how to deal with.

>

>Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the True Fiancee
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> fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

3. Episode 03: First Day on the Job

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 03: First Day on the Job

>
December 30, 1999

>
Kanuka looked at her watch. It was 5:50 in the morning, and she had yet to

>catch a wink of sleep. She looked through the hospital report one more
time. Apparently, her grandmother had gone in simply to get a prescription

>drug to treat some flu symptoms... The routine medical exam led to more
tests, the results of which were serious. Congenital heart failure AND

>bronchitis- the heart and the lung were both in trouble. They'd given her
some medicine to treat the bronchitis, but the more serious problem...

>
She might live another year or two without serious problems, if she took

>things easy, but the prognosis was fatal. Kanuka's grandmother was dying,
and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

>
"Grandma..." Kanuka whispered. It was too early to wake up her grandmother

>yet, and it was probably a bad idea to wake her up anyway, but when she
did... well, they would have to chat about why this had been kept a secret.

>
Sighing, Kanuka got up and went to get herself another cup of coffee. She

>had quite a while to wait.

>* * * * *

>Shinobu stepped in front of the assembled Unit One. Looking at her watch,
she saw she had five minutes until they were supposed to have assembled.

>She smiled- everyone was early. She liked that in her subordinates. She
decided to take the extra time to inspect them all.

>
Yuhki Watanabe was the first one she looked at- he looked happy with his

>promotion into the first labor. Shinobu remembered he used to be a bundle
of nerves when he arrived- and still sometimes got a little scared in

>situations where he was seemingly overmatched- but her opinion of him had
been greatly improved by the Griffon incident. Hopefully, he wouldn't take

>his responsibilities as senior labor pilot too seriously, and make himself
nervous again.

>
Tazaki Hiroaki was next in line. He WAS looking nervous- it wasn't often a

>transport officer was promoted to the command car. In fact, she hadn't

heard of it happening before- but then again, there were only five Special
>Vehicles Police Sections (a.k.a., Section 2's) on Japan's main island of

Honshu- Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Sendai, and (officially as the geographic
>center-point of the Western side of the island, but more because of

political influence than anything- that there were practically no labors in
>the city didn't seem to matter) Kanazawa, and up until now each had only

two units at most. There wasn't much opportunity for such a promotion to
>occur.

>The next person she came to was the old labor driver for labor two, Hideki

Nomo. He was an older man, and an ex-labor pilot from the original
>Patlabor unit. He'd lost a hand in the line of duty, and was given the job

of driving around the labors he loved when he refused both desk duty and
>retirement with a full pension. He looked as indefatigable as ever,
totally unaffected by the shift to labor one.

>
Finally, she reached her first rookie. Koichi Miyagi, the winner of the
>previous day's tournament by the toss of a coin. He looked level-headed

enough, and had that enthusiastic shine in his eyes that only came with the
>belief that nothing could harm them. She shook her head imperceptibly,
knowing that his belief in his own immortality would be shaken soon after
>he began his job. The only person she had seen who had never lost

confidence after working for a time with the police was that girl in Unit
>Two- Noa Izumi, wasn't it? Somehow, Shinobu suspected Izumi's enthusiasm

had nothing to do with her job, and instead her love of labors and her
>relationship with that boy Gotoh was grooming to be his successor- Asuma

Shinohara. She'd heard rumors of the two of them being involved in a
>pretty intense relationship, and considering how he'd risked his life to

save her during that mishap at the tournament, she suspected it was true.
>Of course, there was an unspoken agreement among everyone in the SV2 not to

mention it to their superiors- if they ever reached one of the bureaucrats
>above her or Gotoh, the affair would be ended and the officers likely

suspended.
>
Shinobu moved on to the next person in line- another veteran, Yuhki's old
>command car officer. Toru Sasaki, another grizzled veteran from the

original Patlabor unit, had kept his position only by refusing several
>promotions. He claimed that the newer labors gave him motion sickness,
but also did not want to be transferred out of the SV2. He looked as
>immaculate as always, the brass on his uniform shining and not a single

hair out of place. He was the consummate police officer in every way.
>
She moved on to the final officer in her unit- Ueki Mashimo. His hair

>needed to be cut, and looked as if it hadn't been washed or combed
in
years. His expression looked grim and sour, and he had beard
whiskers
>protruding from spots of his chin. Facially, he looked like a
younger
Inspector Matsui, but he was somewhat thinner, more
muscular... and more
>brutish looking. Well, at least he was more competent than the other
two
she had a chance to take.
>
She looked at her watch. Six o'clock, on the dot.

>
"Welcome to our new officers, and welcome back to our old. You
may be
>wondering how all of our units have been able to take the past three
days
off while we set up the new unit. Well, we've been covered by
Unit Two
>from Kanazawa, but as of 0800 hrs today, they'll be gone. When they
are,
well, we'll take over. The veterans will be pleased to know
that, after
>myself and Captains Gotoh and Gomioka discussed the various options
last
night, we now have only sixteen hours of on-base shifts.
Between 0800 and
>1600 hrs, this unit is on duty, and Unit Two will be on standby
backing us
up while Unit Three will be off. Between 1600 hrs and
midnight, we have OFF,
>while Unit Two will be on duty and Unit Three will be on standby.
However,
if any of you aren't back on base for standby duty for
Unit Three's duty
>shift by 0001 hrs, rest assured I will not be happy." She glanced at
her
officers, and nodded. "Until our duty shift, however, I want
the veterans
>to show our rookies around. Dismissed."

>Shinobu smiled as Takeo and Tazaki paired off to take Koichi Miyagi
around,
while the two veterans from the original Patlabor unit
took the
>rough-looking Ueki Mashimo around- possibly to discuss something
about
grooming. They would keep her command well-respected and
efficient, just
>like it had been when Gomioka was there.

>* * * * *

>Joudo Ishikawa looked at the clock on the wall. The meeting was
supposed
to have started five minutes ago- where was everyone? Was
he in the right
>room? Did he get the time wrong? What?

>A short, curly-haired, button-nosed, wide-eyed bundle of energy
burst into
the room. "I sorry I'm late- my alarm didn't work and
then I couldn't find
>my uniform and then I wasn't sure where I was supposed to go and had
to
look at the announcement again and then I..." Natsume Kawai
blinked and
>looked around. "Where is everyone? Is the meeting over already?"

>Joudo smiled, unable to keep a straight face seeing her
confused
expression. "I don't know... I was here early, and
haven't seen anyone
>yet. Are we in the right place?"

>"I think so- I checked the room number right before I got here..."
she
said, getting distressed. "I hope so... I don't want to get in
trouble..."
>
"Don't worry about it," Ishikawa said brashly, trying to make
the cute girl

>sitting next to him calm down a bit. "If we DID make a mistake, then it
was their fault for writing confusing directions- after all, we both
>arrived in the same place, right?"

>"I... I guess so," Natsume agreed, nodding her head in a way that made her
curls bounce softly. "But it's our first day on the job, and things are
>already going wrong, and-"

>Before she could continue, the door swung open behind her and two
bleary-eyed people came in.
>
"Sorry we're late," a disheveled, sleepy-looking Asuma Shinohara said,
>sitting at the desk in front of the room and propping his feet up. Noa
Izumi, her clothes slightly askew and her hair a mess, took a standing
>position to his right, a little behind him, and yawned hugely. "We thought
your command car operator, Takeo Kumagami, would handle things here, but
>she had to run and get the dispatch reports from the Kanazawa unit that has
been covering for us while we took care of business here."
>
Joudo wondered why the two officers had slept in to begin with, when their
>duty was to be ready for anything, before glancing at how rumpled Noa's
clothes were. Remembering how Asuma had risked his life for the girl the
>previous day, he smiled knowingly. Such a relationship as he suspected
they were having would get them in serious trouble if the higher ups found
>out about it, and so he decided to no question them further. Looking at
Natsume, he knew that she'd bought their story- and that she was very
>nervous being around them. It would be interesting working with this unit-
so far, he'd met two veteran officers having an affair, and a
>cute-but-clueless girl apparently prone to hysterics, his captain (who he
only knew so far from the tournament the previous day) who appeared to be
>bored with everything and took even the near death of the people under him
in stride, and he'd seen at that same competition that another of his team
>members was a giant of a man with muscles reminiscent of... that American
actor, Arnold Swartzenager. He almost laughed when he realized he very
>well could be the only 'normal' person in this unit.

>"No problem, sir," Ishikawa answered.

>Asuma waved him off. "No need to call me sir- my name is Asuma Shinohara,
and this is Noa Izumi," he presented. "We're the backup and forward for
>labor one, an Ingram affectionately dubbed 'Alphonse' by Noa." He smiled
slightly. "No-one here outranks anyone else- I can order Noa around
>because of her position, not because of her rank. Hiromi Yamazaki, who you
will meet later, is also my subordinate but, again, has the same rank as I
>do. Noa, Hiromi, and I all have more experience than you, but we can't
really give you orders unless we're assigned to give you orders because we
>don't outrank you. Well, right now I can, but that's just because I was
asked to brief you and take you on a tour of the facilities."

>
"Asuma..." Noa began, slightly whining, "Why did you wake me up for this?"
>
"I figured you'd want to be the one who wanted to show them the differences
>between the controls of a training labor and the controls of an Ingram,
since labors 2 and 3 are down for maintenance."

>
"Oh... of course I'd want to do that." Noa looked at him oddly.
'That
>was... well, an attempt to be thoughtful, I suppose. He could have just
woken me when they were about to go through Alphonse, though,' she thought
>as she stretched in an attempt to work the sleep out of her muscles.

>"Anyway," Shinohara continued, slightly distracted, and pulled out a
rumpled set of papers. He started to read out, "We go on standby duty in
>about two hours. Standby consists of wearing your uniform and staying on
base, keeping yourself ready to fill in if the Active duty unit is away.
>You can even sleep here, if you like, provided you can be ready for duty in
less than five minutes. Then you go on Active duty, which consists of
>answering calls and, when there are no calls, tending the grounds of the
SV2 Headquarters. Until the formation of the third unit, we were always on
>active or on standby duty unless we had a vacation day, during which time
we were covered by Unit One. Now, we will have such full-day

>Active\Standby duty only when a unit goes on vacation." He looked up.
"Basically, since it takes about two hours get anywhere interesting round
>trip, you'll probably want to live on base most of the time. That you have
any time off without a special day being allocated for it is an
>improvement, however, so you have nothing to complain about."

>"What about meal breaks?" Natsume asked.

>"Well," Asuma considered, "Being in the second unit, our time off is
between midnight and eight in the morning. Few restaurants are open that
>late at night, so I'd strongly suggest you help the mechanics out with the
daily meals. If you help them cook and catch fish, and sometimes help
>Hiromi out when he asks you to look after the tomato vines and hens, you
can share in the common daily meals. There is one restaurant that delivers
>lunch, a chinese restaurant called Shanghai Noodles, for the occasional
change of pace. That's about it."
>
"Anything else we should know before the tour?" Joudo asked.

>
Shinohara shrugged. "Not that I can think of. Anything in particular on
>you mind?"

>"Why were we transfered while our pay still comes from the training budget?
Wouldn't it make more sense to transfer us January 1, so that we start out
>on the SV2's budget?"

>Shinohara nodded. "I think I can answer that. Essentially, if you

aren't
able to cope with life in the SV2 after one day, we can send you back to
>training without it showing up on your record that you were unfit for labor
duty."
>
"Has that ever happened?" Jouido wondered.
>
"Once, and it hasn't prevented the person from returning to the SV2 after
>reconsidering. Yuhki Watanabe, from Unit One, went back to training after
he first got here, and was replaced by Ohta, who recently went on to help
>form Unit Three. When we formed Unit Two, Ohta was moved here and Yuhki
returned to the SV2." He paused. "Any other questions? No? Then let's
>get on with the tour. Noa!"

>Noa, who'd almost been asleep, snapped awake at his voice. "Huh, yeah?"

>"Come on, we're touring the Ingrams first." His expression and tone became
a LITTLE more compassionate. "Then you can catch another hour's nap, if
>you want."

>* * * * *

>Captain Gomioka stared at his watch. Several people hadn't arrived yet,
and it was already ten minutes after the meeting was supposed to start.
>Thankfully, his Unit was SUPPOSED to be off duty for the shift following
the two hour orientation period. Well, all the late arrivals had just lost
>those eight hours.

>He sighed, and looked at the people who WERE around. There was Ohta, the
man he remembered as so obsessed with guns during his stint with Unit One
>that he blew more assignments that could have been successfully completed
than the rest of all five of the Patlabor units combined. There was Akito
>Kenichi, his old command car operator. Akito kept shooting nervous looks
at Ohta, and sitting as far away from the pilot as possible. Akito was
>reliable, but most of his work was usually handled by Shinobu, and he
seemed scared of the pilot he was supposed to backup. Perhaps he might
>want to be exchanged back into Unit One for Toru Sasaki, Yuhki's old
command car operator. Or maybe, if that failed, he could get Takeo
>Kumagami from Unit Two, who probably knew how to manage Ohta better than
most. And besides, she'd be a good person to leave in charge of the unit
>when he needed to be elsewhere.

>The only rookie who had made it was Yamane Seiroku, who seemed to be trying
to keep outwardly calm, but was betrayed by occasionally shifting nervously
>in his seat. Any nervousness his face might have shown, however, was lost
to all watchers because his battered nose seemed to catch the most
>attention. Gomioka sighed- he couldn't read people like Shinobu could.
How did he handle this situation?
>
"Sorry I'm late," someone said, breaking into his thoughts. Gomioka
>turned, and noticed that it was the other transfer from Unit Two- Shinshi
Mikiyasu. "Captain Gotoh stopped me on the way, and asked me to give you

>this note."

>Gomioka restrained himself from asking why it took ten... no, FIFTEEN
minutes to be asked to take a note somewhere, but sighed and accepted the
>piece of paper.

>"Sakaki just let me know that had to steal a couple of your rookies away
from you for a short while. The maintenance squad's transport broke down
>while returning home from delivering the remaining training labors to the
Academy in Fuji, and so Sakaki sent them out in one of the 97's (which he
>said were best equipped for the task) to retrieve it. On the plus side,
this means at least one of the 97's will have a shakedown run after being
>removed from mothballs.

>-Gotoh, Captain"

>Gomioka restrained himself AGAIN from crumpling up the sheet of paper and
storming over to Gotoh's office and giving him a piece of his mind. It
>wouldn't do for his unit to see him as quarreling with the others.

>"Do you know what all of this is about, Mr. Shinshi?"

>"Um... not really, sir. Just a few details- two of the rookies were
borrowed by the maintenance squad for about an hour. I had to wait while
>Gotoh, Shinobu, and Chief Sakaki discussed things."

>Gomioka blinked- Gotoh, he wasn't surprised about- he was a competent if
lackadaisical unit leader, but he also brownosed his way to better service
>with the maintenance squad. He would have thought Shinobu would have
defended him, however. "Did you overhear anything they were saying?"
>
Shinshi thought for a second. "I remember hearing something from Sakaki
>about getting the rookies used to there machines as early as possible, and
some sound of agreement from both captains. Outside of that... sorry."
>
Gomioka sighed. "Alright. I'll postpone this meeting until 0800 hrs, but
>everyone will lose two hours of off-duty time because of this. That is
all."
>
A bit surprised, Shinshi, Ohta, and Akito all left the room, but Seiroku
>approached his captain cautiously.

>"Can I talk to you, sir?" he asked, nervously.

>Gomioka looked at the rookie curiously. This day hadn't started out very
well, and he feared doing something which would cause him even more
>problems, but looking at Yamane he knew that he should listen to him.
After all, this was the first time one of his subordinates approached him
>for help.

>"All right, what is it?"

>"Sir, why was I put into the command car, and Koichi Miyagi put into the
cockpit of the labor? I thought I had a real good chance of making it,
>after my first round match..."

>Gomioka thumbed through some papers on his desk to kill time while he tried
to remember how it had been decided. Something about a defective labor

>part... Ah, that was it. "The first round match wasn't considered in the
final decision because of some technical problems in the other labor. It
>wasn't considered serious enough to disqualify you, or to change the
results or anything, but it was considered enough for us to make the policy
>of only looking at the second round fights."

>Seiroke trembled. "Is there any way to challenge that decision?"

>Gomioka shook his head. "Sorry, it was final."

>"B-but..." Yamane hesitated. "I vowed to my parents I would become a labor
pilot for the SV2 or I'd never return home... I was so hoping..."
>
The captain looked at Yamane's worried face, and frowned. That was
>certainly a foolhardy oath to take, but it almost certainly had given him a
drive to succeed. And he HAD been impressed with the rookies first
>match... he very well might have been a better pilot than... Koichi, was
it? He'd never remember that boy's name- he just seemed to fade into the
>background as soon as he won his match...

>"I cannot reverse the decisions that have already been made. However...
every Patlabor unit is assigned three labors, but is only assigned pilots
>for two of them. Occasionally, we will need all three in action, however-
Unit two has had to utilize their third labor a number of times, I
>understand. I can make you Labor 3's pilot, unofficially, and if you prove
yourself and we have an opening..."
>
Seiroke's face lit up. "You'll give me a chance? Oh, thank you, sir!
>Thank you!" He rushed out of the room and in the direction of the phone.

>Gomioka smiled slightly. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad today, after all.

>* * * * *

>*Beep beep beep beep*

>Kanuka was startled into full wakefulness as the alarm clock blared. 'Huh?
I didn't set any alarms... what time is it? SIX THIRTY? Who set-'
>
"Ah, Kanuka," her grandmother said as she silenced the clock. "Why are you
>here?"

>"Grandmother, what are you doing setting an alarm for this early in the
morning?!"
>
"Why," her grandmother smiled. "Getting myself up in time to fix

>breakfast."

>"You should be resting-"

>"I've been getting up this early for the past fifty years! I think I can
handle it... especially since I got to bed so early this morning." Her
>grandmother slowly stood up and stretched.

>"Grandma," Kanuka said, a note of warning in her voice. "I found the
medical report."
>
"Oh, you did?" her grandmother answered, flinching slightly but covering it
>up by turning towards her dresser. "Well, I was hoping I'd be able to talk
to you about it before you saw that report- in fact, I was

hoping you'd
>have gone back to New York, first."

>"What?!" Kanuka exclaimed. "Why?"

>"Oh, I know you- now you're not going to return to your home and
your job."
Silence reigned for almost a full minute. Kanuka
couldn't deny it- that
>was just what she was planning on doing. Her grandmother, seeing
how
speechless she was, embraced her and continued, "You ARE a
professional,
>remember? I don't want you losing your job taking care of a dying
woman.
And there's nothing you can do, either- except maybe speed
my death by
>trying to pamper me too much. Let me live my last months without
feeling
the guilt that I would if you were to lose you job caring
for me. I'll be
>fine."

>"Grandma, I..." Kanuka couldn't continue. She loved her grandmother
so
much, and here she was saying to forget about her in her time
of need. She
>couldn't do that. "I can get an assignment in Japan again... a
temporary
one, which won't even affect my possible promotion. One
which will leave
>me some free time... if for no other reason than to visit."

>"Kanuka..." Her grandmother looked into her granddaughters eyes,
and
sighed. It was impossible to tell her no when she was that
determined.
>"ONLY if you are CERTAIN it won't effect your career, I... would
allow you
to visit me while on your new job."
>
Withdrawing from her grandmother's embrace, Kanuka nodded.
"Thank you,
>grandma. I'm afraid I'll need to skip breakfast- I need to try and
find a
job."
>
With that, she rushed out of the door, unintentionally slamming
it behind
>her.

>Her grandmother sighed. "I knew hiding that file wouldn't work... I
just
wish I had been able to convince you to go back home. Now, I
can only hope
>you find your job, because I'm pretty sure if you don't you'll just
quit
the police to be with me, and that would hurt me more than
you could
>possibly imagine..."

>-----
Next Episode: The maintenance crew
discovers Natsume Kawai, Yuhki gets
>nervous, Kanuka asks for a job, and the SV2 waits for Y2K.

>-----

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anime fanfics available at
> <http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

4. Episode 04: Birth of a New Millenium, Pa...

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert
legal junk here...

>
Episode 04: Birth of a New Millennium, Part 1

>
December 30, 1999

>
Kanuka walked through the door and up to Gotoh's desk. "Captain, can I

>talk to you?" she asked.

>Gotoh blinked. Kanuka didn't usually barge into his office and ask him to
talk without knocking first. In fact, he was somewhat surprised she was in

>the building- by his watch, her plane was leaving in a few hours, and she
barely had time to get on it. "Well... Unit Two doesn't go on active duty

>for another couple of hours, and things have been quiet so I doubt we'll be
needed for other reasons, so yeah, sure."

>
"Sir, my grandmother is... ill. I want to ask you for a job in your unit

>for a while, so I can stay in Japan and take care of her."

>Gotoh thought about it for a moment. "Hmm.... Ill, you say? Ill in what
way? How long do you need to stay here?"

>
Kanuka was silent for a moment before sighing. "She's... dying. She's got

>a year, maybe a little longer, but she isn't expected to recover..."

>Gotoh's eyes widened. "What is her problem?"

>"Heart condition... and bronchitis, but that's treatable. She'll be able
to live normally for a while- after she gets over the bronchitis, that is-

>but she's got a year at most. I... just want to be around her as long as I
can."

>
Gotoh looked at his one-time subordinate for a full minute before replying.

>"I can't give you a job in Unit 2, and I'm not sure there's a job
available in any labor unit right now. The rookie class of 1999 was just

>sent to fill in all available slots. If anyone decides to return to the
academy, there might be an opening, but it almost certainly wouldn't last

>for a full year. However..."

>"Yes?"

>"Do you think you'll be able to deal with an assignment to the Academy?
They're always looking for experienced labor pilots as instructors, and

>your time with us will make you an even better candidate. You wouldn't be
able to get the position for another three months- the Academy doesn't

>re-open until the first Monday in April- but I might also be able to swing
you an intermittent assignment with the street patrol until it does."

>
"Street patrol?" Kanuka said, her nose wrinkling in disgust.

"You mean as

>a traffic cop?"

>Gotoh shrugged. He turned to look out the window at the gathering storm
clouds approaching- it was supposed to snow sometime that day, but hadn't

>started yet. Looking outside, all Gotoh could do was think about how
inadequate his offer was. "Essentially, but it's the best I can do on

>short notice."

>"I would never...." Kanuka's voice trailed off. No, she wouldn't ever
have considered going to the traffic cops- she was a labor

pilot, after

>all. That was all she was good at- and she was one of the best out there-
and she would never have considered being a traffic cop even if it meant

>resigning... except, in this case, she didn't have much choice. If she
didn't get SOME job here, she couldn't stay with her grandmother... "I

>guess I don't have much choice. Do you mind if I borrow your phone and
call my captain in New York? I'm going to need to get his permission, and

>I might need you to talk to him as well..."

>Gotoh nodded. "Go ahead, I'll back you up as much as I can." He paused.
"I pretty sure all of the old gang will."

>
Kanuka stopped for a moment. A small tear was forming in her eye, and she

>couldn't afford to let anyone see it or her reputation would be ruined, so
she forced herself to stand still for a moment to recover.

>
* * * * *

>
Shige was looking through the engine of the labor transport for Unit Two's

>Labor 2 when he heard it- a thumping sound followed by a distinctly female
yelp of pain. Quickly dropping everything (including a toolbox that landed

>on his foot and forced him to hop around on the other for a few seconds
while recovering from the pain) he made his way to the sound. There he

>found the cute labor officer which he and most of the rest of the
maintenance crew had only seen at the tournament, and even then they'd

>barely gotten a glimpse at her.

>There she was, rubbing away the pain in her derriere. Shige's eyes
widened- this cute little girl would be WORKING here? Every day? In the

>same building as HE was?! He was almost speechless.

>"Uh... are you okay, miss?" he finally got out.

>"Ow... yes, I think so. I fell trying to climb into the transport's cab-
that step is too high..."

>
Shige looked at the cab and noticed that it probably was, in fact, too high

>for the girl. Shinshi had never complained about it, true, but then again
this girl was nearly a half foot shorter than he was.

"Hmm... I think

>you're right. Tell you what- give me about a half hour to finish the
tune-up I'm giving to the engine, and I'll mount a small step ladder for

>you."

>Her face brightened. "You will? Thanks!" she squealed, giving Shige a
brief but powerful hug. With that, she dashed off in the direction of Unit

>Two's lounge.

>Shige didn't start moving again for another ten minutes.

>* * * * *

>A couple of hours later, Shige strolled into the Maintenance Squad Lunch
Room (really, just an empty storage area with tables set up) and sat down

>with a happy sigh, a smile on his face. He seemed to be just picking
through his food, and those in the room who knew him well figured something

>weird was going on.

>"Hey, Shige, what's going on?" one of the junior mechanics asked him.

>"Oh... you know that new female labor officer?"

>"The cute one?" another of his friends asked.

>"Yeah... well, I offered to install a step ladder for her Labor Transport,
and so she... she HUGGED me!"

>
"Wow..." said a third mechanic.

>
More questions about the incident followed, but there wasn't really much

>else that Shige could say. So, with that, the rumors started to circulate.

>* * * * *

>"Did you hear? Shige got hugged and kissed by whatsername- Natsume, the
new female labor officer!"

>
"No way... Shige? Ah, man- that girl must be desperate!"

>
"Well, she could just be very friendly- maybe she'd hug and kiss anyone!"

>
"Maybe that would mean WE could get her to give US hugs and kisses!"

>
The exuberant whispering continued until Chief Sakaki showed up, at which

>point things became dead silent. When Sakaki left, conversation picked up
again... but was a bit more subdued.

>
* * * * *

>
When night fell that day, so did the snow. Winter had finally arrived in

>Tokyo, and soon the ground was blanketed in a soft white carpet.

Things
were quiet for the SV2- most of the time, snow tended to pacify criminals,

>and the only problems were with traffic accidents. That made it a
difficult night for some traffic cops, but not for labor units.

The next

>morning, however, Kanuka was thankful her transfer didn't take effect until
January 1st when she read the paper and saw exactly

how many accidents

>there were.

>December 31, 1999

>Gomioka sat down in the captains office, and started writing.

Absolutely
nothing had happened during his active duty period, and he was just about

>to collapse in boredom. Funny, when he was a labor pilot, he at least had
something to do most of the time- he'd ordered his own unit to do the

>dishes and clean the kitchen, then to trash out the cafeteria. Just busy
work, yes- something he'd done a millions times and found boring himself-

>but at least something to do. The only work he had was to sit around at
the phones and wait for a message to come in. Hopefully, he could get

>suggestions from Shinobu for things to do to kill the time, but not right
now- she was out with Unit One supporting the rescue squad as it attempted

>to save a construction labor that had lost its traction and slipped off of
the building it was working on, holding on to a girder to keep it (and the

>pilot) from falling to its demise. He made a mental note to ask her when
she got back, though.

>
Now, of course, he had to write a report SAYING nothing happened during his

>active duty shift- how in the world was he supposed to do that? He could
always ask Captain Gotoh how he did it, but Gomioka wasn't exactly sure how

>useful he would be- Gotoh always struck him as being a bit shady-not
corrupt, exactly, just not very by-the-book. Gomioka prided himself on

>being a model officer, and would NOT look to Gotoh as an example of how to
do things, if he could avoid it.

>
He was a little surprised when Kanuka Clancy came into the office- he

>thought she was back in New York already. She looked at Gotoh's desk
before walking over to him. "Did Captain Gotoh leave a note for me?"

>
"Um, no- or if he did, he didn't give it to me. What are you looking for?"

>
Kanuka absently brushed a hair from her eyes. "My grandmother is very ill,

>and so I've asked for an assignment here until... until she gets better.
I'm eventually being transferred to the Patlabor Academy, but until classes

>open there I need an intermittent assignment- probably as a... TRAFFIC
COP," she said with obvious disdain. "Gotoh is supposed to have a listing

>of some openings for me today."

>Gomioka blinked. What kind of illness would last so long she'd need to be
here until April, at the very earliest? It was none of his business,

>however, so he chose not to pry. Instead, he made a suggestion. "Don't
take any assignments in either the Bokuto or the Nerima provinces."

>
She blinked. "Why's that?"

>
"Well, Bokuto has the reputation of having the WORST traffic violators in

>all of Tokyo. Real nutcases- very dangerous stuff. Also very boring-you
almost never get anything BUT traffic violations. Nerima, on the other

>hand... well, a lot of cops call it a 'grey area.' So many weird things
are rumored to have happened there- monsters, epic battles of martial

>artist which cause millions of yen in property damage, and..." he blushed
slightly, "Panty thefts. However, that precincts cops are specifically

>ordered NOT to arrest those involved- some have political connections, some
have too much money and are able to BUY the connections, and some are

>considered to be undetainable- mostly the martial artists. But, like I
said, you can't arrest any of them, so most people assigned to that

>district get frustrated at not being able to do ANYTHING." He sighed. "If
those two are your only choice, choose Bokuto- at least there you have

>something to do. I know right now I'm suffering from near terminal
boredom."

>
"Ah- slow day?" He nodded in response to Kanuka's question, to which she

>smiled slightly and continued, "Well, I'd suggest you try doing what Gotoh
does to pass the time, but you're married."

>
Gomioka frowned. What did being married have to do with anything Gotoh

>could do on the job? "What is that?"

>Turning to walk out the door, Kanuka looked back at him, the same little
>smile on her face. "Hit on Captain Nagumo... and get rejected every time"
>
>Gomioka sighed, turning back to his report. Yep, he would definitely avoid
>asking Captain Gotoh for advice any time soon.
>* * * * *
>Chief Sakaki waited at the terminal for a while. Finally, Shige showed up.
>"Ah, Shige- you're here. Good. There's something I've been wanting to
>ask you..."
>Shige sighed when he noticed the computer was on. Ever since the Chief
>decided to start learning computers, he'd come up with questions commonly
>associated with those 'Funny Computer Support Line Questions' he'd found so
>many copies of on the internet. Things like people using their CD players
>as cup holders, and people thinking something was seriously wrong with
>their computer when it was just unplugged. Fortunately, Sakaki had done
>nothing like that yet, but he'd come close- Shinohara had mentioned
>something about reformatting some storage disks before each use, and he'd
>personally seen him mess up the computer's configuration files about a
>dozen times. This was not going to be fun.
>"Yes, Chief? What is it?"
>Sakaki pointed to the computer screen. "I was... how do you kids put it?
>'Surfing the Web,' and I found this site. It mentioned something about the
>'Y2K Bug' effecting almost anything with a computer in it. What is this
>bug, and how does it effect our labors? Should we be making preparations
>for tonight?"
>Shige looked at the screen- the web page Sakaki was looking at was a couple
>of years old- though probably accurate for the time. "Don't worry about
>our labors- their computer systems were built after this person put up this
>information. The worst that can happen to them is to find that data from
>outside sources, like satellite uplinks, a little unreliable. Nothing to
>worry about."
>Sakaki nodded and turned back to the computer. "Okay, thank you, Shige."
>Shige turned away, not wanting to see the chief typing in URLs instead
>using his bookmarks- why did he make them if he didn't use them, anyway?
>* * * * *
>It was about ten minutes till midnight when Shinobu walked in to get ready
>for standby duty. Gotoh's unit was on active duty, and Gomioka's was
>preparing to go on active duty. It was the first time all three captains
>had been in the office at the same time that day.
>"I haven't seen you since I went on active duty this morning," she said to
>Gomioka, smiling. "How was your first full day as captain?"
>"Actually," he admitted, "It was quite boring. What do you usually do on
>those quiet days when nothing is happening? I was able to give my

labor
officers some busy work, but I didn't really have anything to do myself

>except sit around and wait for a call which never came."

>Shinobu laughed. "Well, usually I just sit around and chat with Captain
Gotoh, or read a book, or do the crossword puzzles in the paper... There

>really isn't much that can be done as far as work is concerned, unless you
wanted to 'supervise' your subordinates in their busy-work, if you're not

>on a case. It doesn't really matter what you do, as long as you're near
the phone and you don't let your hobbies interfere with your professional

>work. I understand Captain Mamoru Oshii scribbles down notes for this
manga he's been working on. I could give you some more suggestions, but I

>think it would be better if you were to just come up with something to do
on your own."

>
Gomioka blinked. When he'd heard from Kanuka that Captain Gotoh spent his

>time flirting with Captain Nagumo, he'd assumed that not only was it
something that was very unprofessional, but it was something unwelcome as

>well. He certainly couldn't imagine someone as serious about her job as
Shinobu encouraging such a thing on the job, but as she just said,

>their 'chats' were just a way of getting rid of the boredom. He also was
astounded to learn that she did things like read books and fill in

>crossword puzzles on the job. Well, he had much to learn.

>His thoughts were interrupted by a banging from the door. Without waiting
for any of the three captains to give their permission, the door opened and

>Shinohara strolled in, carrying a television. "Hey, Captain Gotoh! I have
the TV set you wanted to watch the New Years celebrations on!" he bellowed.

> "I split Unit Two's dorm room's cable from the antenna upstairs so that
you could get a clear channel, since we have the best reception, I think."

>Noa followed him with the cable line.

>Gotoh smiled. "Ah, good, you got it. Set it down on my desk, facing the
door, would you? That way, there'll be more room for Captains Nagumo,

>Gomioka, and myself to sit around it."

>Asuma and Noa, working together, hooked up the television in under a
minute. Shinohara turned the TV on and set the channel to the appropriate

>station. Assured it was working properly, he turned to the captain.

>"Everything's set up now, sir. I hope you enjoy the- ack!"

>"Come on, Asuma- we have to get back to the dorm room before midnight! I
don't want to miss this!" Noa said, dragging him by the back of the shirt

>and inadvertently choking him as she scrambled out the door.

>Gotoh chuckled at the departing chuckle. Gomioka smiled at the humor of
the situation, as well, but wasn't entirely sure that the relationship of

>the two labor officers was appropriate for people in their position.

That
everyone kept it a secret for them disturbed him even more.

>
In fact, he was a little uncomfortable with keeping secret the

>fact that Noa had smuggled in a few bottles of her family store's champagne
to help her, Asuma, and the rest of Unit Two celebrate the New Years

>with.... However, even he had to admit that Noa and Shinohara were largely
responsible for Captain Gotoh's unit being as effective as it had been- of

>course, now that Ohta was one of the labor pilots in HIS squad instead of
Gotoh's, it should be easier for Unit Two to gain much of the

>respectability that Unit One had. Gomioka sighed- Ohta would be trouble
when they were called in to assignments. Things were going to be pretty

>rough for the new Unit Three.

>"Hey, come on," Gotoh was saying, breaking in on Gomioka's thoughts.

"Aren't you going to join Shinobu and me around the television? It isn't

>every day you see the birth of a new millenium."

>"Uh, what? Oh, yeah, of course! Thanks for arranging this," Gomioka said
politely, and joined him and Captain Nagumo on the three chairs in front of

>the television. Shinobu sat between the two of them- something both men
were happy about. Gotoh, because it meant he was sitting next to her, and

>Gomioka, because it meant he DIDN'T have to sit next to the man who'd
foisted Ohta Isao on him.

>
"...commonly felt that the new millenium will bring with it many advances

>in society," Momoko Sakurayama, the reporter for SNN, was saying, standing
in front of a fenced off zone with a small labor about twenty feet behind

>her. A light snow had covered the ground, and her hair had been frosted
lightly. "Including the development of faster and stronger labors- such as

>the one that will be sending out the signal of the new year in Japan two
minutes from now. We have with us Mr. Jitsuyama, a plant manager for

>Shinohara Heavy Industries, who will explain how this prototype labor
will-"

>
Suddenly, the picture disappeared and all that was heard was interference

>as the signal disappeared. "What happened to the picture?" Shinobu asked,
concerned. She wanted to see this just as much as Gotoh did, and it was

>actually her suggestion that he bring the TV into the office. Of course,
she didn't think he'd actually take her up on it, but since he did, he

>wanted to see the turning of the millenium.

>"Hmm, I don't know," Gotoh frowned, examining the back of the television
where the cable was plugged in. "Maybe it's the antenna."

>
"How about another station? Maybe they're having technical problems..."

>
Gotoh half-smiled. "Well, I hate to turn it off of someone who actually

>gives us good press on occasion, but I guess we don't have much choice."
He flipped the station to where a male reporter was

televising from some
>party, with a clock showing a little under a minute until midnight.
"There
we go."
>
"I wonder what happened at SNN?" Gomioka pondered.
>
"I dunno- but let's not worry about it until after midnight,
okay?" Shinobu
>asked, smiling.

>Neither Gomioka nor Gotoh could say anything in response to that
plea, and
settled down to watch the television. Everyone kept
quiet until the
>countdown began, and then they echoed it with their own voices.

>"Ten... nine... eight... seven... six... five... four... three...
two...
one... HAPPY NEW YEARS!" They all cried. Gotoh puckered up
in the hopes
>that he could entice a New Years kiss out of Shinobu, and
approached.

>* * * * *

>Noa looked at Asuma as she popped the cork on the cheap
champagne,
celebrating the New Year. If he was her boyfriend, then
he'd probably try
>to get a midnight kiss or something. He looked back at her, with
something
like regret on his face. Was he interested? Was he
scared of her
>rejecting him? Just in case, she leaned in, hoping to show her
interest.
Shinohara's eyes widened when he noticed.
>
* * * * *
>
All over the SV2 Headquarters, seconds before two kisses might
have
>happened, power went out.

>* * * * *

>Gotoh fell on his face in the dark, missing Shinobu completely.

>Nagumo herself was walking over to the phone. "I'm going outside to
see if
anyone's trying to start up the backup generator."

>
Gotoh picked himself up off the floor and searched his desk with
his hands.
> "I'll come with you," he said, turning on a flashlight he picked
up.

>Shinobu nodded, and the two went outside to see the generator.
There, they
found three members of the maintenance squad, led by
Shige, trying to get
>the dusty old gasoline generator started up. Shinobu was about to
suggest
they return to the office and report the power outage when
she noticed
>Gotoh staring across the bay.

>"What's wrong?" she asked.

>"Tokyo is powered by multiple power plants, right?" he replied.

>"Yeah, so?"

>"Even if a whole plant went down, Tokyo should have power from
the
generators in the other plants. So why are the only working
lights in
>buildings which have their own independant generators?"

>Shinobu looked across the bay as he pointed, and noticed that,
except for
at a hospital, there wasn't one building she could see
which had any lights
>on at all. Tokyo was in blackout.

>-----
Next Episode: The SV2 helps to stop
several riots caused by the blackout.
>Yuhki shows he still gets nervous. A plane crashes into Tokyo. And
a
number of other things that were supposed to happen in THIS
episode.
>(and please remember, this was written BEFORE the Y2K scare went
bust)

>-----
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>Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the True Fiancee

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5. Episode 05: Birth of a New Millenium, Pa...

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
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legal junk here...

>
Episode 05: Birth of a New Millennium, Part 2

>
In this episode, {...} means speech in Russian

>
January 1, 2000

>
At an airport in Vladivostok, the passing of midnight went
without

>incident. Shortly after the arrival of the new millennium, a
turboprop
aircraft belonging to Aeroflot Airlines left, bound for
Manilla in the

>Philippines. The one hundred thirty four passengers and crew
settled
themselves in for a VERY long flight- their first stop- in
Seoul, Korea-

>wasn't for another twelve hours. They'd heard that a number of
large
cities had been hit by the computer bug known as the 'Y2K
Crisis,' but

>midnight had come and gone, and the airports were still intact- even
in
Tokyo, the hardest hit major city, the Airport had restored
service in less

>than a minute, and was experiencing no problems- it was even
still
accepting incoming flights (though they weren't sending out
any additional

>flights). The autopilot was set after reaching ten thousand feet,
and the
pilot leaned back. His only job for the next nine hours
was to keep an eye

>on the autopilot and make sure it didn't malfunction.

>Sighing, the cabin crew of Aeroflot flight 201 sat back in their
seats. It
was going to be a LOOONNG flight.

>
* * * * *

>
The three captains, Sakaki, and all the residents of SV2
Headquarters all

>assembled in the labor hangers. "Okay," Shinobu began. "This is what
we
know so far. The phone works, and we were able to get in touch
with the

>power company. Apparently, a serious computer problem- which they
thought
they had taken care of but hadn't had time to test before
this crisis

>occurred- has crashed everything... including the backups... for the
central
administrative office, which crashed all the computers at

each individual
>facility. They are manually restarting the plants, but so far
they've only
gotten a few stations working- Tokyo won't have
enough power to run even in
>brownout conditions for another forty-eight hours. It'll be weeks
before
they've restored every plant."
>
Gomioka stepped up. "That, believe it or not, is the good news-
things
>will be fixed before too long. However, the blackout has led to a
severe
panic in the public. Riots are breaking out in the streets-
mostly just
>unarmed citizens, but there are too many of them for the regular
police to
handle. They've asked us to go in and help with crowd
control- and there's
>also the possibility that the rioters may gain control of heavy
vehicles
like labors, which would also be our jurisdiction. We
were asked to go in
>with tear gas guns, however, so the only anti-labor weapons we will
have
will be our electromagnetic batons. We want ALL functioning
labors in the
>city- that includes the third labors of Units One and Three. Sakaki
tells
me that Unit Two's third labor was cannibalized for spare
parts, so it is
>excused. The other two units will be needing manpower- and
fortunately
we've got an extra labor pilot on base. However,
assemble with your
>captains for assignment- some of you will not be performing your
usual
function."
>
The three captains ran off, and were followed by their units.
Gotoh went
>into his squad room, and was followed by Unit Two's people. "Okay,
we're
the only unit which is going to have just two labors in the
action. We're
>also the first unit to get duty- Shinohara, your labor's got the
patrol
around the Imperial Palace. Kumagami, your labor's to deal
with the bridge
>into the reclaimed land. Any questions?"

>As usual, about everyone's hand went up.

>Similar assignments were given out to the other units- Unit One,
with
Kanuka Clancy piloting the third labor, Shige from the
maintenance squad
>driving the transport, and Shinobu taking the command car, managed
to
outfit all three of its labors with full crews, and quickly
placed
>themselves into position.

>The Third Unit, however, was in much worse shape, personnel-wise.
Gomioka
almost took the third labor for himself, but looked at his
assembled squad
>and remembered his promise to the hopeful-looking Yamane Seiroku.

Remembering his promise to make Yamane the de-facto pilot of the
third
>labor, Gomioka took the position of command car operator for all
three
labors. Akito was asked to drive the transport, and off they
went. Their
>was only one command car, so all three labors had to go to the same
area-
for that reason, they were assigned to the area with the
largest number of
>rioters.

>Just before getting into the cab of the third labor's transport,
Seiroku
showed up in front of Captain Gomioka. "Sir, thank you

sir!" he gushed.

>"I promise not to let you down!"

>Gomioka nodded. "Just don't disappoint me."

>With that, the Third Unit went on its first assignment- riot control around
the newly-completed tallest building in Tokyo, the Tower City project,

>Tower 1. The building which rose almost six thousand feet into the air.

>* * * * *

>Most of the rioters retreated at the sight of the three hulking Type 97's
that showed up around the Tower City project. Those few that remained ran

>off when Ohta started shooting most of his tear gas cartridges into the
crowd, their eyes burning. Peace was restored for the moment.

>
It did not last long, however, as one of the retreating rioters got it into

>his head to hot-wire a nearby construction labor that was supposed to be
used to begin construction on Tower 2 in a few days, and turn it against

>the cops. Soon, that man's friends started to do the same to a couple of
other labors in the same lot, and soon five construction labors charged in

>against the three Patlabors, an army of rioters behind them.

>"Oh, god," was all Gomioka could say before Ohta started firing at them.
The tear gas did nothing to the labors, which continued charging.

>
"Stupid gas guns!" Ohta snarled, tossing the device he cursed at the

>labors- and actually taking the knees out from one of them. "If we had
REAL guns, they'd show more respect for the law!" Pulling out his baton,

>he charged in, followed by the other two patlabors (which lobbed gas
cartridges over the rioting labors and into the crowd behind them), and

>engaged them hand to hand.

>Unfortunately for Ohta, he'd completely forgotten how stiff and
unresponsive the Type 97s were compared to his old Ingram, and soon found

>himself on the ground and at the mercy of the construction labors.

>Or he would have been if Seiroku hadn't used his labor to pick up one of
the construction labors and toss it into the two others standing over the

>fallen Ohta. Kenji Iguchi engaged the final labor, and managed to get it
into a standoff while Yamane helped Ohta up. Finally, all three labors

>were up and ready, and surrounded the final labor. Without any support,
the last of the rioters surrendered.

>
* * * * *

>
A beloved Ingram stood sentry duty at the Imperial palace. The labor crew

>had heard of a number of riots in other areas, and some looting in the
Ginza (which was supposed to be covered by Kanuka's labor), but so far

>there was nothing happening in the area patrolled by the labor known as
Alphonse.

>
"Say, Noa," Shinohara began softly into his radio link, after having spent

>a lot of time in thought. There were several questions he wanted to ask
her, but he wasn't sure if it was the appropriate time. Without anything
>else to keep him busy, however, and not being able to concentrate on
anything but those questions, he couldn't ignore them. He just had to have
>an answer.
>"Yes, Asuma?" Noa replied, wondering why he wasn't using his normal voice.
>"About the party..." he said, trailing off because he wasn't sure he knew
how to go on.
>
Suddenly, she realized what he was trying to ask her. Still, she would
>wait for him to finish before she answered. "Yes, Asuma?"

>"Were you... I mean did you try... I... oh, never mind. It wasn't
important," he said, unable to get it out. 'Chicken! I can't even ask her
>if she was trying to kiss me or not!' he thought to himself spitefully.
'But it's probably for the better that I not know, anyway.... I mean, if
>she WAS, then...'
>"Um... okay," Noa replied, confused. 'Wasn't he going to ask me if I liked
him?' she wondered.
>
* * * * *
>
"Requesting permission to fire the gas gun!" Kanuka screamed into the
>radio. Nearly fifty looters were still on the streets, stealing clothes,
televisions, anything they could get their hands on.

>
"Permission denied," Shinobu answered. "If you get tear gas on those
>products, then they won't be recoverable. Save that option for the last
resort- try to cow them into submission first."

>
"Affirmative," Kanuka replied. She stormed into the middle of the melee,
>and turned on her loudspeakers. "Attention- this is the police. Drop the
stolen goods and return home. If you fail to comply, you will be
>arrested."
>Some people did as Kanuka ordered, but several remained and continued
looting. With as much precision as possible, the Type 0 Labor began
>picking people up with one hand and trapping them in the crook of its arm.
By the time the regular police had arrived, she had nearly a dozen people
>so entrapped, and soon they were carted off to holding cells.

>"Situation normal," Kanuka reported. "Anything I should be aware of?"
>"Hmm... Riot police have stabilized most areas already. Unit Three may
require some help, however... I understand that their labors were somewhat
>damaged- though still functional, they might have trouble if some more
labors show up. Why don't we head to assist them?"

>
"Affirmative."
>
* * * * *
>
By eight-fifty in the morning, the riots were over. A hard snow

was

>starting to fall throughout the area. Partial power had been restored to
>some of the city, and the police were out in force. Unit Two, which had
>been up for twenty-four hours, was sent home and given an extra shift off,
>and things seemed to have finally calmed down.

>
That was when it started to hit midnight, Greenwich time.

>
* * * * *

>
"Um, sir," an air traffic controller said to his boss. "We seem to have a

>serious problem. Suddenly most of the transponder codes disappeared from
>the radar- I have no idea what caused it, but now we don't know which plane
>is which."

>"Odd," his chief said. "Well, get on the radio- ask all planes in the area
>to send you their flight information and position- try to keep track of

>them that way. And get them in here as soon as you can. Hopefully, we can
>cut down on the confusion that way."

>
"Yes, sir."

>
"Good. While you do that, I'll find out from the runway crews if that snow

>will force us to shut down the runway."

>* * * * *

>"{Dmitri!}" the pilot of Aeroflot flight 201 yelled at his navigator.
"{Why didn't you tell me we were off course?!}"

>
Dmitri blinked, looking at the old navigation console. The device was

>obsolescent, but he maintained it fairly well and it never failed him. Oh,
>sure, the new Global Positioning Systems were nice, but they required

>connections to various new satellites which his system had no access to,
>and it would cost too much money to replace the old system. It should

>still be good until the old satellites died, after all.

>"{Sorry, sir- didn't notice it.}"

>The pilot nodded. "{That's okay- it was a malfunction of the autopilot,
>apparently. Just keep an eye on that navigation system- visibility is

>almost zero in this snowstorm.}"

>"{Yes, sir,}" Dmitri answered.

>About two and a half hours later, they went down to five thousand feet and
>started looking for the Seoul airport's radio signal.

>
* * * * *

>
"Sir, I'm detecting another plane coming into the radar," the air traffic

>controller said. "Coming in from the Northeast. IFF Transponder not
>responding."

>
The chief sighed. "Very well. Let them know we've closed the airport-

>direct them to Nagasaki."

>* * * * *

>"Attention, unidentified flight," the radio crackled. "This is Tokyo
>International Airport. All airstrips in Tokyo are shut down due to snow-

>please head to Nagasaki, instead. Repeat, unidentified flight- the Tokyo
International Airport is CLOSED. Divert to Nagasaki."

>
"{Heh... sounds like this snow storm is huge, to be effecting Tokyo as
>well. Any luck contacting Seoul?}" the pilot asked, looking intently at
the altimeter to make sure they weren't going in too low. They were still
>at five thousand feet.
>Dmitri shook his head. "{Nope... doesn't appear we're on their radar
yet.}"
>
"{Odd, they should have picked us up by now.}"
>
"{Hmm... I wonder if- hey, what's that ahead of us?}"
>
* * * * *

>
"Hey, Madoka," a man said to his new wife as they stood at the observation
>window on top of Tower 1 of the Tower City project. "How do you like the
view?"
>
"Lovely, Kyosuke. This has been a great second honeymoon, despite the
>blackout," his wife said. She leaned in for a kiss.
>They broke off the kiss a moment later, and turned to look out the window.
>"Kyosuke, is that a PLANE heading for the window?"
>Kyosuke looked out the window. "Oh, my god! Hold on!" he cried, grabbing
on to his wife.
>
Aeroflot Flight 201 crashed through the window moments later. Somehow- the
>method of which some might think could only be magic- the young couple had
escaped seconds before it hit.

>
* * * * *
>
"What was that?" Ohta asked, looking up. He wasn't in his labor at the
>moment- he and Shinshi were in the process of replacing the battery. Just
as they had finished securing the pack, a loud explosion came from above.
>
"Oh, my god! An airplane crashed into the tower! It's spinning out of
>control!" Shinshi cried. Ohta glanced in the direction Shinshi was
pointing, and saw a passenger plane spiraling downwards, its nose and one
>wing crumpled beyond recognition.
>"FIRE IN THE HOLE!" Shinobu cried. Ohta looked up directly above him, and
saw a piece of a wing descending upon him. Shortly before it would have
>splattered him, Shinshi drove him under the cover that the trailer allowed.
Burning wreckage collapsed around them.
>
"That was close," Ohta gasped. "Thanks."
>
Shinshi nodded, breathing heavily. "Yeah... no problem."

>
They stepped out from behind the trailer as soon as they were certain that
>the debris had finished falling, just in time to see Kanuka's Type Zero and
Seiroku's Type 97 running off towards the crash site.

>
Ohta turned to get into his labor and join them, when he saw the damage
>that was inflicted by the falling debris. He growled.
>"Bah... looks like I'm out of the action for a while." His Type 97 was
buried, and Kenji Iguchi's labor had already moved to dig it

out.

>
* * * * *

>
The two labors tag teamed to rip open the wreckage and search for

>survivors. The 97 was working effeciently, but from time to time it would
slow or a limb would tremble. As they sorted through the grisly remains,

>Kanuka checked up on the rookie.

>"How are you doing, so far?" she asked over the radio.

>"Uh... well, ma'am, I think I'm able to handle it. I've never seen a dead
body before, though, and this...."

>
"Don't worry about it. I've never known a labor unit to be called in to a

>situation like this before, and most of the situations where they ARE
called in rarely have any casualties- a labor can take a hell of a

>pounding, and the pilot will still be safe. If you perform properly in
your rescue missions it's unlikely you'll ever encounter a body without a

>labor fight first. Just keep your head for this situation, and I'd be
surprised if you needed to deal with another death for the rest of the

>year."

>"But what about now, ma'am?"

>"Just realize that there was nothing you could do to save these people, and
keep working.

>
"Yes, ma'am," Seiroku replied. "Thank you, ma'am."

>
As they continued to work, Kanuka noticed a definite improvement in the

>work of the young rookie, and smiled. 'So, I'm going to be teaching at the
Academy in a few months, eh? Well, maybe I can use this experience to help

>me prepare for it... '

>* * * * *

>About a half hour into their clean up, shortly after the REAL rescue teams
got the message and arrived, a moaning was heard.

>
"{Dmitri... Dmitri, what's going on?}" the dazed voice said.

>
"We've got a live one!" came the enthusiastic shout of one of the rescue

>workers. "He's buried here- in the COCKPIT area!"

>Using the two labors, they dug the injured but alive pilot from the cockpit
assembly, and he was rushed to the hospital.

>
* * * * *

>
January 2, 2000

>
"...and so it turns out," Shinshi was saying, reading the paper in Unit 3's

>work room, "That the airplane crash was caused by an obsolescent computer-
the same bug that led to the blackout that covered this city last night."

>
"The rescue," Seiroku read aloud from a different paragraph in the same

>article. "Was accomplished with the aid of two members of the much
maligned SV2 Section 2, which also assisted successfully in crowd control

>during the riot."

>"Finally," Ohta bellowed. "We get a little respect! Who's the reporter
who wrote the article?"

>
Seiroku checked the top of the column. "Special correspondant

Momoko

>Sakurayama, based on interviews with Captains Nagumo, Gomioka, and Fujimoto
of the riot squad."

>
Shinshi sighed. "Of course- she ALWAYS supports us. You think one of

>these days we could find ANOTHER reporter willing to tell our side of
things?"

>
Gomioka sighed, staring at Ohta. While he had done fairly well for this

>assignment, he knew that much of the SV2's bad reputation was caused by
him. "I doubt it- not for a long time," he said, thinking 'As long as Ohta

>was still a labor pilot, we never will find one.' He sighed. 'Maybe I'll
be able to get rid of him one of these days. Just maybe...'

>

>Episode 05 Closing Notes: Just to let you all know what was going on here,
this was essentially a 'worst case scenario' for the Y2K bug- many utilities

>were expecting to be able to get themselves Y2K compliant before the new
millennium, but they weren't sure they'd have time to do all the testing

>they'd need. Airports should not have been effected- at worst, they'd have
to go to backups for power to the radars, etc, but airplane IFF Transcievers

>might have been effected. Also, most modern Satellite Navigation systems (such
as modern Global Positioning Systems) could not be effected, but older,

>obsolescent ones (like the ones used by many Aeroflot aircraft) that were
dependant on accurate dates could be, and such aircraft are likely to become

>lost. I just came up with this idea, one day, when one of my teachers gave a
lecture on the horrors of Y2K. In fact, it was the first of the ideas I'd

>started writing down that started Patlabor: Personal files, back in Jan. '99.

>Next Episode: Follow Gomioka on a typical day in his life as Captain of
the Third Unit.

>

>-----

>---
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<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7872>

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6. Episode 06: The Life of Gomioka

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 06: The Life of Gomioka

>
January 5, 2000

>
The alarm went off at Gomioka's bedside when the clock read 2100 military

>time. Yawning, he reached over and slammed down on it, turning it off.
Too tired to remember why he'd set it, he rolled over and went back to
>sleep.

>He felt a stinging sensation as his wife slapped him awake- hard. "Time to
get up and go back to work, dear," she said icily.

>
Gomioka blinked and sat up, staring at the back of his retreating wife as
>she headed for the kitchen. 'Why'd she hit me so hard? Oh, yeah... she's
still mad about me inviting Clancy to the ceremony. When is she going to
>realize I just think of that American woman as a friend?' His wife had
long suspected him of having an affair with Kanuka, but that was
>preposterous. The only think between them was professional respect.

>Sighing, he got out of bed and started to get dressed in his uniform. Each
unit from the SV2 had been given an extra shift off (the standby shift, in
>most cases, though Unit Two had been given an extra active shift off as
well, for working through their off-duty shift- they had the 7th scheduled
>off, and the third unit was supposed to cover one of their shifts on
standby) for the work done during the Millennium Crisis, and he had time to
>sleep at home the previous night. Now he was starting to wonder if it had
been worth it to go home. He and his wife hadn't been on the best of terms
>for a while now- though she did still support him publicly, at least.
Still, she had a jealous streak a mile wide, and the temper to back it up.
>
He moved into the dining room as he finished tying his tie, and sat down
>for the meal. His wife served him and then sat down across from him.

>"So, dear," she began with strained politeness- which was at least better
than the icy attitude she had displayed waking him up that evening. "How
>is work going?"

>"Oh, fine, Kinuko," Gomioka said to his wife absently, glancing at the
headlines on the evening edition of the paper and munching on the shrimp
>tempura his wife had made for him. It was a little soggy, but he didn't
care- it was better than the usual food he had at the SV2's cafeteria.
>
"Hmm... so, are you having any problems adjusting to being a captain?"
>Kinuko asked.

>Gomioka shrugged. "Well, I have a lot more duties that are a lot less
interesting. I almost wish I hadn't accepted the promotion, but we do need
>the money."

>Kinuko frowned. "Is Kanuka still working with you guys?"

>Gomioka caught the warning in her voice, and smiled slightly. This would
make her happy. "No, she's been temporarily placed in the street patrol,
>prior to a job at the Academy in Fuji. She's staying in Japan for a while
to take care of her grandmother, who's very ill."

>
"Oh, how sad," she said with false sympathy. "But why didn't she get a job
>with your new unit?"

>"There weren't any openings, so she didn't have a choice."

>"Oh, well. So, when do you have to leave for work?" she asked, much more
cheerily.
>
Gomioka looked at his watch. "Well, I have to be at work at midnight, and
>it'll take me an hour and a half to get there, so I've got about an hour if
you want to do something," he said hopefully.
>
"Ah, well... do you want to watch television with me?"

>
Gomioka deflated slightly. "Sure, what's on?" As they settled down in
>front of the television, he began to wonder about the woman he married.
When they'd first met, she was a passionate person who would spend any
>moment they had together doing something romantic and exciting. Now, the
most romantic and exciting thing they ever did together was watch
>television together, and that was only if she was pleased with him. If
they ever slept in the same bed again, or kissed, or even held each other
>in front of the television, it might be worth all of the temper, all of the
jealousy, and all of the suspicion she had... but without even the
>slightest hint that she still cared about him and not just about his money
and position, he didn't feel as if the marriage was working out. Oh, well-
>at least she'd forgiven him for the moment.

>He sat back and watched the twenty year old shogun drama that his wife
wanted to watch. He didn't have long before he had to be back on the job,
>so he might as well relax while he could.

>* * * * *

>January 6, 2000

>"Captain Gomioka, Third Unit, reporting for duty!"

>Gotoh smiled as he stood up from his desk, and returned the salute. "Have
fun," he said, stepping out of the office.
>
Gomioka almost snarled at him. The third unit was guaranteed the graveyard
>shift every night- which was also the most boring shift around. So far,
the only time they'd been called out was that huge incident caused by the
>turning of the millennium. And, with Captain Nagumo off of standby duty,
he didn't even have anyone to talk to. Sighing, he settled into his seat,
>and pulled out the classic illustrated novel he had brought with him- a
historic book he should have read years beforehand.

>
After ten minutes, he gave up on his reading. For some reason, the Tale of
>Genji didn't really appeal to him. Oddly, it made him worry more about his
relationship with Kinuko- stories of adulterous wives and men who slept
>with many women didn't help him to forget his marital difficulties.

>Sighing, he stood up and started pacing around the room. He glanced

at the
TV set that had been left in the room following the events on New Years,
>but decided against watching it. Apparently, the only stations they could
get were SNN and NHK, and by now he'd be lucky to get anything other than
>weather or sports.

>A knock on the door preceded the entrance of Ohta Isao. "Captain Gomioka,
sir!" he bellowed.
>
"Yes?"
>
"Our rookies are bored, sir. I was wondering if I could entertain them
>with some firearms drill, sir?" he asked hopefully.

>Gomioka considered it for a moment. "It is awfully late at night," he
answered. "And Unit Two is sleeping in the dorms- it wouldn't exactly be
>polite to wake them up."

>"We could use the silencer, sir!"

>Gomioka almost laughed. A labor gun with a silencer was only a little
quieter than a low-caliber handgun. Still, he had been rather bored, and
>it had only been ten minutes since the second unit's shift had ended, so
probably no-one was asleep yet.... "Very well- if you can arrange a
>demonstration that will be over within the next half hour- and that I can
see from this window- I'll allow it. But after that half hour, not ONE
>MORE SHOT, got it!?"

>"YES, SIR!" Ohta cried enthusiastically. "Thank you, sir!" With that, he
turned, and almost ran out the door.
>
Gomioka sighed. He really didn't want to feed Ohta's obsession, but it WAS
>something to do...

>* * * * *

>It was two o'clock in the morning, and Gomioka was struggling to stay
awake. Ohta's target practice was certainly interesting- as good a shot as
>he was, the man could be an excellent cop if he could just control himself
in situations where firearms weren't required. However, many had tried and
>failed to do just that, so it didn't seem too probable he ever would learn
control.
>
Asuma Shinohara, surprisingly without the company of his girlfriend and
>partner, Noa Izumi, showed up in the middle of the practice to complain
about the noise. Gomioka apologized profusely- not that he was surprised
>that someone had shown up for him to need to apologize to. He felt a
little guilty for KNOWINGLY keeping people awake when they were as tired as
>Shinohara looked, but he honestly thought no-one would have been asleep by
that point.
>
It had been over an hour since then, and the excitement that Ohta's
>firearms drill had brought was long gone. There was nothing to do except
sit at the phone- he was caught up with his paperwork for the next month
>and a half, it was too early in the fiscal year to worry about the budget,
he STILL couldn't bring himself to read any more of the Tale of Genji, and
>not even the weather reports were over by that point. Both SNN and

NHK
were off the air.

>
He sighed. All he needed was something to break the monotony....

>
The phone started ringing. Gomioka almost laughed- just when he asked for

>it. Answering the call, he said, "Special Vehicles, Second Section.

Captain Gomioka speaking."

>
"Hello, sir," a dispatch officer replied. "We've got a call that could

>require a labor. Could you send one to the Kurokawa shopping center in
Akasaka? We have a standoff apparently involving members of the Beach

>House terrorist organization."

>"Beach House?" Gomioka repeated. He'd heard of that organization, but
usually it was Gotoh's unit who dealt with them. He considered sending

>Ohta, who had faced off against them before, but that thought lasted about
a half a second before he shook it off. After all, it was just a standoff-

>Ohta was bad at standoffs, from what he'd heard. In fact, he was bad at
pretty much everything but shoot-outs. That meant sending the rookie team,

>but there might not be any labor action after all, and besides, he'd go
with them. Normally, he'd go in with both labors, but one had to stay

>behind in case another call came in. He COULD wake Shinobu up and ask her
to handle duties on standby, but this didn't sound that important. "I'll

>be there shortly. Officer Ohta will remain behind to take calls."

>"Ohta?" the operator said, choking on the name. "Very well- we'll only
make another call in an absolute emergency."

>
* * * * *

>
"Come out with your hands up! You cannot stand against the glorious force

>of the Japanese Police! Surrender! You do not stand a chance! If you
give yourselves up peacefully, we will show mercy.

Otherwise..." the

>sergeant in charge droned on into the megaphone.

>Gomioka sighed, relaxing into the seat of his car. This was almost as
boring as sitting around the office doing nothing, but it was also giving

>him a headache from the noise. Briefly, he wished he'd brought Ohta with
him- it would probably have caused serious problems, but at least it would

>have lead to something to do. Besides, it would have given him an excuse
to drum the trigger-happy labor pilot out of his unit.

>
Suddenly, a burst of static over his radio alerted him to an incoming

>message. "Calling Captain Gomioka, this is dispatch."

>"Dispatch, Gomioka here," he replied to the radio.

>"We got a call in here for another incident- one where we know labors are
required. There is a drunk labor pilot on the rampage, and officer Ohta

>went to investigate. He tried to page you, but apparently they are still
down from the Millennium Crisis."

>
"Will respond- where is the location of the call?"

>
"Babylon Project Experimental Facility Gamma. Beware- there are a number
>of explosive chemicals on the site."

>'Oh, god- and Ohta's on the way?' Gomioka thought, panicked.

>* * * * *

>Gomioka and the second labor team were about three blocks away from the
site when a giant explosion rocked the docks upon which the facility was
>built.

>"What the hell is going on!" someone cried over the radio.

>"Hurry! Raise Iguchi's labor- prepare for search and rescue!"
Gomioka
shouted into his microphone. "I think that was Ohta... and if it was, then
>he's in serious trouble. Seiroku- take your command car and drive around
to the other side of the wrecked building and see if there are any
>survivors on that side!"

>"Yes sir," he cried, and his little command car sped off to circle around
the burning structure. The Type 97 that Kenji Iguchi was piloting rose on
>its trailer and stepped out towards the building, when another explosion
sounded, sending shockwaves that knocked the labor to the ground and drove
>Gomioka's car backwards.

>"This is Gomioka calling dispatch," Unit Three's captain said into his
radio. "Send fire and rescue immediately. There is the possibility of
>officers down." He bowed his head down. "We cannot handle it ourselves."

>* * * * *

>About ten minutes later, Seiroku reported in over the radio. "I saw
several unidentified men fleeing the scene, carrying some crates of
>equipment or something. I would have investigated further, but thought it
more important to see if I could find any injured people around. Officer
>Shinshi is here, with his labor transport, but he was unconscious when I
found him. He appears to be all right now, but the damage to the cab has
>put the trailer out of commission. In addition, the command car is here
and serviceable, but Officer Akito Kenichi is injured badly- some of his
>internal monitors shattered and sent glass into his face. He seems to be
mumbling something...."
>
In the background, Gomioka could hear the injured man chanting, "I knew he
>would get me killed one of these days... I knew he would get me killed one
of these days... I knew he would get me killed one of these days...."
>
"I read you. Ambulance and rescue crews are on the way. Keep searching-
>maybe Ohta's labor was able to protect him from the brunt of the blast."

>"Affirmative, sir," Seiroku replied.

>Gomioka threw down the transmitter in disgust. "One week as captain, and
already one possible death and one serious injury among my subordinates.
>This job just keeps getting worse and worse!"

>"Captain," Yoshi Tobe, the second labor's transport driver, said over the
radio. "The rescue team is here. Shall I tell them to begin searching for
>officer Ohta?"

>Gomioka picked up the radio transmitter again, calming down a little.
"Affirmative. Inform them we have an injured officer located on the other
>side of the building, still sitting in his command car, I think. Also,
warn them that there is the possibility of additional explosions."

>
"Understood," Tobe acknowledged, and soon the firefighting labors worked

>their way into the burning building and began to put out the fire.

>"Calling Captain Gomioka, this is dispatch," the radio crackled again.

>The Captain sighed. "Here."

>"I have a Captain Nagumo on the line, asking if you require assistance."

>"Nagumo?" Gomioka blinked. 'What is she doing up?' he wondered. Her unit
wasn't supposed to be on duty for another two hours.

>
"She said Officer Ohta informed her of the situation, and she ordered her

>unit on standby."

>Gomioka considered bringing her in for a little bit, but sighed.

What
could she do at that point? "Inform her that we have at least one officer

>down, and that one labor is effectively out of commission. I don't believe
we are able to respond to any more calls tonight, so if she could remain on

>standby for the rest of the night, I would be very thankful."

>"Affirmative," dispatch said, and the radio crackled into silence.

>It returned to life a few seconds later when fire and rescue called in.
"Captain, this is Labor FR-1. We have found the remains of what looks to

>be a Type 97 police labor. The cockpit looks intact, but I am unwilling to
inspect further until I can retrieve it from the building. It is very hot

>in here, and if I were to open that cockpit we might roast the person
inside alive."

>
"It would serve him right," Gomioka muttered.

>
"Say again?" Labor FR-1's pilot requested.

>
"Uh... never mind. Just do whatever you can."

>
* * * * *

>
About an hour later, Captain Gomioka was out of his car and riding in the

>ambulance with a recovering Ohta, who had just started to tell his story as
it pulled out. Officer Seiroku was placed in charge as Unit Three's

>uninjured men waited for the arrival of the equipment which would take away
the wrecked vehicles.

>
Ohta had been lucky in that the cockpit had shielded him from the blast,

>but power had been knocked out (which was not surprising, considering the
only surviving part of the labor was the cockpit).

>
"Well, sir, I waited for ten minutes for backup before following

the

>apparent DWI inside the main warehouse. There, I discovered that he was
not actually drunk- just faking it in order to cover the theft of a large
>amount of equipment that had been loaded into the truck."

>Gomioka blinked and nodded. "Interesting. Officer Seiroku thought he saw
some people carrying some equipment away, himself, but was too concerned

>with the welfare of yourself and your labor crew to pursue them."

>Ohta gingerly grinned. "He should have gone after them- it's not wise to
let criminals escape, especially possible cop-killers." His smile dropped

>painfully as a nurse applied some salve to one of his burns. "Anyway, I
ordered the perpetrators to surrender, when they ran away, taking the truck

>with them. During there escape, I recognized one of their members as
belonging to Beach House." That drew a startled gasp out of Gomioka, but

>Ohta continued. "Thier construction labor faced off with me. I drew my
gun and attempted to fire, only to find my labor was not armed.

>Apparently, someone forgot to reload the gun following my session of target
practice."

>
Gomioka nodded- that little bit of amnesia on the maintenance squad's part

>was his suggestion, in order to keep him from shooting someone if they were
called in to support a search and rescue operation- which was about the

>only thing Gomioka thought his unit would be doing during those winter
months, when criminal activity was down. He was SUPPOSED to be nearby in

>case there came a situation where Ohta needed his gun, and the maintenance
squad was SUPPOSED to have reloaded it if Ohta was going into a potentially

>dangerous situation alone. Apparently, niether one of those safeguards
worked.

>
"I will speak with the person responsible," he said, but wasn't too

>concerned. The lack of a firearm probably postponed the explosion for a
short time- perhaps enough time for the rest of Unit Three to arrive and

>perform the initial stages of search and rescue. All it meant was that
Ohta probably wasn't the cause of the explosion.

>
"I WANT WHOEVER IT WAS DRAWN AND QUARTERED!" Ohta nearly shouted, then

>winced at the pain doing so caused. Continuing in a much softer voice, he
said, "Finding my gun inoperable, I dropped it and drew out my

>electromagnetic baton. I succeeded in disabling the other labor with a
strike to the power center, but the electricity that soared through the

>baton doing so fried my labor's control system. The pilot of that labor
leapt out and tossed a grenade. I was unable to do more than close the

>hatch, and seconds later it blew."

>"A grenade caused the blast, you say? Hmm... I wonder if the person who
used it realized this place was full of high explosives...."

>
Before Gomioka could pursue that line of thinking, the ambulance arrived at
>the hospital and Ohta was wheeled out.

>* * * * *

>The wall clock read 7:45 a.m. by the time Gomioka had returned to SV2
headquarters. Sighing, he sat down in his chair, waved to Shinobu, and
>started writing his report on the incident.

>"Welcome back," she said, approaching him. "Rough night?" Concern was
etched in her voice.
>
"I can't remember a worse one in my whole career," was his reply. "I've
>been captain for a WEEK, and two men are seriously injured, one labor is
completely destroyed, one labor TRANSPORT, which are generally thought of
>as indestructable, is out of the action for at least three days...." He
just sighed and shook his head.
>
"And you had to call in search and rescue because you couldn't handle
>things yourself," she finished for him. "Wondering whether or not you
deserve to wear that rank yet?"
>
He snorted. "Of course I am. And my conclusion is just as obvious- I
>shouldn't be wearing it at all. I made several critical mistakes- for one
thing, I split up my team. That goes against some regulations, and it
>CERTAINLY isn't a very bright thing to do. To make it worse, I went with
the team which didn't need as much supervision if things got dangerous,
>simply because I was bored and didn't want to hang back when I could be
doing something. Finally, when the situation became critical, I had to
>call in help because I couldn't deal with my own unit's problems."

>Shinobu nodded. "All true. And also all very easy mistakes to make- I
made them myself when I was a rookie captain, and with just as disastrous
>results. In fact, my mistakes were so bad most of my original team
transferred to different units. I was careless, and it nearly cost the
>lives of three men. But I think I turned out okay- I just needed
experience."
>
Gomioka looked at her in awe. "You goofed up this badly?"

>
She nodded and smiled. "Worse. My goof-up came on live TV, in front of an
>international audience. Yours came in the dead of night with no-one around
for miles." Her smile grew. "The trick is to learn from your mistakes,
>and not repeat them."

>"Thanks," was his all too meager reply.

>"Anytime," she said, and returned to her desk. Gomioka watched her go.

>Kinuko was always worried he was having an affair with Kanuka Clancy, but
that was just ridiculous. He thought she was a very accomplished person,
>yes, but he didn't really find her attractive- and her personality left
something to be desired. He liked fiery women, but not THAT fiery.
>
No, it was foolish for his wife to worry about someone like

that. Now, if
>she were to worry about someone like Shinobu Nagumo, on the other
hand....

>-----
Next Episode: The Lost Episode. Will
not be reposted. A New episode, which
>includes the important events from that part, is being considered,
but as of
yet no definite plans exist to replace it. If you would
like to try and write
>such an episode, please contact me via e-mail. Thank
you.

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the
True Fiancee
> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
> <p><p>

7. Episode 07: (Temporarily Removed)

Return-Path: desaix@sysnet.net
>Received: from desaix (b53beth53.sysnet.net [206.142.16.115])
 by
unix6.sysnet.net (8.10.1/8.10.1) with ESMTP id f240ohf08660
> for desaix@sysnet.net; Sat, 3 Mar 2001 19:50:43 -0500
(EST)
Message-Id: 200103040050.f240ohf08660@unix6.sysnet.net

>From: "David A. Tatum" desaix@sysnet.net
To: desaix@sysnet.net

>Subject: PLB07.txt
Date: Sat, 3 Mar 2001 19:48:58 -0500

>X-MSMail-Priority: Normal
X-Priority: 3
>X-Mailer: Microsoft Internet Mail 4.70.1155
MIME-Version: 1.0

>Content-Type: textplain; charset=ISO-8859-1

>Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
X-UIDL: 0lc!!J9H"!8e"!n')"!

>
Episode 07 has been removed at this point. It will be replaced
at some
>future date, but at the moment there are no plans for
when.

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the
True Fiancee
> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
> List owner of the Temporary FFML Refuge (FFML-R)
 To subscribe,
send a blank message to
> FFMLRefuge-subscribe@listbot.com
 And follow the instructions in
the response...

8. Episode 08: A Father's Wisdom

Patlabor: Personal Files
>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert
legal junk here...
>
Author's Note: Episode 07 was abandoned (after nearly six months
of
>struggling to make it work out). What exists of it will now be known

as a
'lost episode.' If someone wants to take it off my hands and rewrite or
>revise and complete the episode, let me know... after all, I am quite willing
to allow guest authors to write certain episodes (as long as they aren't ones
>I particularly want to write). There were two major things that happened in
Episode 07 that should be noted before reading this one- the first one is that
>Akito Kenichi resigned from Unit 3 to be replaced by Kanuka, who transferred
from the street patrol after being, er, overwhelmed by the wackiness inherent
>in the precinct. The second major thing that happened is that, in response to
some rather bitter taunting, Noa accidentally revealed that she's not a virgin
>(technically, she was responding to being called a 'maiden') to all of Unit 2.
She and Asuma have yet to have a chance to talk about this....
>
Episode 08: A Father's Wisdom
>
January 7, 2000
>
Noa was nervous- finally, an off day. One where she and Asuma could go out
>for drinks like they had talked about the previous week, and perhaps have a
long and meaningful talk. For one thing, she was... concerned... about
>what he thought of her announcement the previous day. It isn't every day
you blurt out to the whole world that you, a twenty-two year old Japanese
>girl, are not the innocent maiden everyone thinks you are.

>But also... also, if that went well, she wanted to break it to him- she
wanted to move their relationship forward a bit. Maybe not enough so that
>their friendship would be lost if things didn't work out, but perhaps they
could go on a few 'official' dates, and see if they COULD be more than
>friends.

>Now, all she had to do was find him and remind him of his promise to go out
for drinks.
>
* * * * *
>
Asuma looked through his closet, trying to pick out something to wear. His
>baseball cap, of course, was a must- he almost always wore it on off-duty.
It used to be his late brother's, after all- one of only a very few relics
>he had been able to save. The only other one he'd taken with him to the
SV2 was that scarf he gave to Noa when they went to visit the Grave a month
>before.

>The rest of his outfit, however, was difficult to choose. He didn't really
know what he was doing today, so he had no clue whether he should wear some
>jeans he didn't mind messing up, a pair of semi-dress slacks he could wear
into a decent restaurant, or something even more formal.
>
Hiromi knocked and stepped into the locker room. "Asuma, there's a
>telephone call for you."

>Asuma blinked. "For me? Who would be calling me?"

>"I'm not sure- I didn't get a name. Should I go ask him?" Hiromi asked.

>Asuma shook his head. "No, don't bother. I'll go and ask him myself."
With that, he straightened the uniform he hadn't gotten out of and followed
>Hiromi to the phone.

>When Asuma returned, his decision had been made for him. Reaching into the
closet, he pulled out the most formal set on non-uniform clothing he had.
>
* * * * *
>
Noa blinked when she saw Asuma walking down the stairs. 'Either he plans
>to take me somewhere much more expensive than I was planning on going to,
or he forgot that we were going to go out today.' She paused. 'Or he
>doesn't WANT to go out with me any more after hearing that I'm not a
virgin.'
>
She approached him slowly. "Asuma?"
>
He blinked, as if in a daze. "Eh, what?"
>
"Weren't we going to go out today?" she asked cautiously.

>
"We were? Oh, sorry... forgot," he said absently. "I'll take a raincheck,
>but there's something else I need to do right now. See ya later."

>With that, he slipped past her, out the door.

>Noa sniffed. 'He's avoiding me. He... he can't deal with me having
had...'
>
Unable to handle her own thoughts, she turned and ran off into the dorm
>rooms, tears in her eyes.

>* * * * *

>Asuma unlocked the door to his car and was about to get in when another
member of the female gender ran up to him enthusiastically.
>
"Mr. Shinohara, sir!" Natsume Kawai called, running up to him.

>
Asuma flinched at the use of his last name. "Yes?"
>
"Mr. Shinohara, sir, can I get a ride with you into town? Just to any bus
>stop will do."

>"No, I'm not headed into town," he answered, a little harshly.

>Natsume blinked. "Please? Pretty please? Can't you just do me a little
favor and take a little detour to get me to a bus stop? You're the only
>person with a car on base in all of Unit 2, and-"

>"Then borrow Noa's motorbike," he snapped. "I can't take you anywhere
right now. Excuse me, I can't afford to be late." He stepped into the car
>and slammed shut the door.

>"But I don't know how to drive a motorbike!" she called out as he drove
away.
>
* * * * *
>
Hiromi gathered up the dirty clothes that had overflowed out of the hamper
>and stuffed them back in. Unlike most of the others of Unit 2, he didn't
have any special plans for the off day other than to get some neglected
>chores done. That included doing everyone's laundry, a top to bottom
cleaning of the locker rooms, and some other things that would otherwise

>never be done, despite the many hours of busy-work that the members of the
SV2 were constantly assigned.
>
"Oops- forgot the detergent," he said to no-one in particular. He sped off
>to the utility closet by the dorms. To his surprise, he heard some
sniffing on his way back as he passed by one of the rooms. Pausing, he
>decided to investigate.

>Noa looked up in surprise when Hiromi walked in and quickly tried to wipe
all evidence of the tears which had been pouring down her face. "Hiromi!"
>she said, her voice cracking.

>"Ms. Izumi?" the soft-spoken giant replied. "What's wrong? Why are you
crying?"
>
She sniffed. "Crying? I'm not crying."
>
Hiromi frowned. "I might not say much, but I'm part of your labor team as
>well. I can tell something's wrong even though I don't know you as well as
Asuma does..." He frowned when Noa jumped at Asuma's name. "Now what is
>the problem?"

>Noa didn't say anything for a moment. Finally, her tears started falling
back down her cheeks. "Hiromi, A... Asuma is avoiding me. I blurted out
>to the whole world that I wasn't a virgin because some pompous jerk was
getting under my skin, and now Asuma won't have anything to do with me...."
>With one last burst of energy, she gasped out, "I've lost him."

>Hiromi blinked. "How is it you know he's avoiding you?"

>"Well, we had plans for today, and he just ignored them and went out. Said
he had something else to do, but wouldn't even tell me what... and he was
>in such a hurry- he HAD to have been avoiding me!"

>Hiromi looked perplexed. "Are you sure it didn't have anything to do with
that call from his father he got a half hour ago?"
>
"No, I'm not 'sure' about anything, but it sure looked like... wait, did
>you say his father called him?"

>Hiromi nodded. "Yes. They talked for about a half hour, and then Asuma
went into the dressing room and put on his best suit and, of all things, a
>baseball cap." A slight twinkle developed in his eye. "I didn't let him
know that I knew it was his father- I thought it best that way."
>
Noa, however, wasn't listening- instead, she was thinking very hard. 'His
>father? He was very dressed up- more so even then when he visited his
brother's grave. Maybe... maybe they're about to have some sort of
>meeting? In which case, it's not too surprising that he seemed kind of out
of it when I saw him- he wasn't avoiding me, he was just stressed out over
>his father!'
>She gulped. "I hope," she said aloud.

>"What was that?" Hiromi asked.

>"Oh, never mind," Noa said, wiping away the last of the tears. "Thanks,
Hiromi... you know a lot more than you let on, don't

you?"

>
Hiromi smiled. "Well, I just don't have occasion to say much, that's all."

> His expression then turned serious for a moment. "Don't worry- he won't
let a little thing like a mistake in the past ruin your relationship-

>you're too important to him."

>Noa blushed. "Um, thank you." She paused. "Actually, I don't think a
simple 'thank you' is enough right now. With Asuma gone for the day, all

>my plans are ruined. How about I help you out around here?"

>Hiromi just nodded, not saying anything.

>* * * * *

>"I can't believe Asuma would turn down a cute girl like you," Shige was
saying to Natsume Kawai. "Well, if he won't do it then I guess I'll have

>to. I'll see if I can take labor 3's command car and drive you down to the
bus station in a minute. Let me go talk to Gotoh and I'll be right back."

>He started running off, one hand behind his head and smiling like a maniac.

>Noa and Hiromi, carrying four buckets filled near overflowing with dirty
clothes (three by Hiromi, one by Noa), started to pass by Natsume as she

>stood, waiting. Seeing an opportunity, she ran up to Noa.

>"Ms. Izumi!" she called, running up to her. "Ms. Izumi, can I talk to you
for a second?"

>
Noa looked from Hiromi to Natsume and back again. She said she'd help him,

>but she didn't want to be rude and just ignore the girl who wanted to talk
with him. Without another word, Hiromi took the basket from her, added it

>to the three he was already carrying, and nodded.

>"I'll handle it, Ms. Izumi," he said. "She seems to need you more than I
do right now."

>
"Thanks again, Hiromi," she said before turning her attention to Natsume.

>"Now, what can I help you with?"

>"Ms. Izumi, is there something wrong with Mr. Shinohara? All I did was ask
him to give me a ride into town and he snapped at me! Then he drove off

>without any sort of explanation..."

>A couple of mechanics in the next room overheard this. "Asuma yelled at
Natsume?" the first one asked as they snuck out of hearing range.

>
"That Shinohara! He already treats Noa like dirt- and the only thing that

>makes it forgivable is that they're going out and she doesn't seem to mind
it herself, but now he's starting in on Ms. Kawai too? That's no fair!"

>
"Yeah!" the first mechanic said. "We should do something about it!"

>
"But what could we do?" the second mechanic asked.

>
"Hmm.... Come with me- I have an idea."

>
Meanwhile, Noa was explaining things to Natsume.

>
"...Yeah, it's been real trying for him," she was saying. "He

and I once
>got into a REAL big argument about it. I kept demanding he try
and
reconcile with his father, and he wouldn't even hear about it.
Well, that
>flared up and we wound up not speaking for several days."

>"Sounds bad," Natsume commented.

>"It was. We kind of made up without ever resolving it, though, when
he
saved my life in a labor battle." Noa sighed. "Maybe it's being
resolved
>now... at any rate, he's under a lot of stress. It's not surprising
he was
a bit upset."
>
Natsume smile. "Thanks, Ms. Izumi. I was afraid he was still mad
at me
>for that mistake I made in the tournament."

>Just then, Shige returned wearing a jacket and carrying a set of
keys.
"Ready to go?" he asked.
>
Natsume nodded. "Whenever you are."
>
"Come on- let's get out of here before the chief finds out I'm
leaving."
>
As they left, Noa stood, pondering. A slight smile spread across
her face.
>'If he was so upset he acted like that to Natsume, it's no surprise
he
would be a little... detached... when he was talking to me.
It's just
>natural,' she thought. 'Maybe I still have a chance, after all.' Her
face
clenched in determination. 'No- no maybe about it. I DO still
have a
>chance....' Then it softened again. 'I hope.'

>* * * * *

>"Your son has arrived, Mr. Shinohara, sir," a servant said.

>Okami Shinohara, the owner and president of Shinohara Industries,
tensed
nervously. "Show him in, Tsukai."
>
"Very good, sir," Tsukai replied, slipping out the door.

>
A moment later, he returned, bringing Asuma with him. Asuma was
wearing a
>very stylish formal western suit- black dress jacket, black pants,
white
shirt, and a tie. The only thing which seemed off about the
whole affair
>was the battered old baseball cap he wore.

>Okami glanced at the hat, pain in his eyes. "Did you HAVE to wear...
oh,
never mind. Come on, it's well past my normal lunch time.
Let's eat."
>
Never one to pass up a good meal (even if it was offered by his
father),
>Asuma nodded and followed him to the table, where a wide variety of
foods
had been placed. They served themselves civilly, and started
eating in
>silence. After a few minutes, however, Asuma grew impatient with the
quiet
and resolved to do something about it.
>
"So... why did you all-of-a-sudden decide that I was fit to be
eating lunch
>with you again?" he began with hostility.

>Okami sighed. "Do we have to fight? After the graveyard incident, I
was
hoping that we could get together and maybe see if we couldn't
resolve our
>differences." Staring up into his son's eyes, he continued, "I'd
like to
know why you hate me so much."

>
"Hate you?" Asuma asked sardonically. "Why should I hate you? After all,
>all you did was drive my brother into insanity and eventual suicide with
your constant demands for us to be better in school, more conformant to the
>general public, and just good little ambassadors for the company. All you
did was toss me out when I failed to meet your expectations and force me
>into civil service. All you did was-"

>"Enough!" Okami cried. "I know I've made some mistakes, but everything I
did I thought was in your best interest. Of course I wanted you and your
>brother to be better! Every parent wants their child to be better off than
they were. I wanted you and your brother to be able to do what I didn't,
>and to not have to ruin your own lives to make something of yourselves."

>"And throwing me out?"

>"That was to teach you some responsibility. And it seems to have worked!
From what I hear, you're part of the only good team in all of SV2- you
>alone maintain its respectability."

>Asuma sneered. "You expect me to be swayed with flattery? You think I'm
going to fall down at your feet and tell you I'm sorry I ever doubted you,
>and what a horrible son I am for not seeing it all sooner? Hardly!"

>"Don't take that tone with me, young man! You should be more respectful
of-" Okami paused mid-sentence and hung his head. "Must we fight every
>time we open our mouths? We seemed to be doing fine at the cemetery, and
we were doing pretty good here until we started talking. You and I share
>the same blood coursing through our veins- is there no way we can find
something to talk about which won't lead to us fighting with each other?"
>
"I doubt it," Asuma said, glaring at his father.
>
Okami opened and closed his mouth several times. "Well, fine then. Let's
>eat in silence- we're a family, and if not talking is what it takes to keep
us together than we shouldn't talk to each other."

>
Without another word, he went back to his food, picking at it with his
>chopsticks.

>Again, the silence grew unbearable. Finally, Asuma couldn't stand it
anymore. "Dammit! I'm sorry, dad- there's probably something we can talk
>about without fighting. I just can't think of what."

>A thin smile broke out on Okami's face- perhaps there was a chance for
them, after all. "Hmm... well, we could catch up on what's been happening
>in each other's lives. Who was that girl I saw you with? Is she your
girlfriend or something?"
>
Asuma blushed very faintly. "Her name is Noa Izumi. No, she's not my
>girlfriend. Not really... she's just my forward- my partner."

>"You're blushing," Okami noted.

>"Well... I sort of wish there was something more," Asuma admitted.

"But it
wouldn't work out- for one thing, it's against the rules for two people in
>the same unit to have an intimate relationship..."

>Okami snorted. "It's not like you've let the rules get in your way,
before. I don't think you'd let that stand between you and this 'Noa'

>girl."

>Asuma bit his tongue to keep from snapping back angrily. Pausing a few
seconds to calm down, he actually considered what his father said. It was

>more or less true- if that one rule was all that stood between him and a
deeper relationship with Noa, he wouldn't let it stop him.

>
"Well... there are a few other reasons I don't think it would work, as

>well."

>"What are they?" Okami asked.

>Asuma thought about that for a moment. What WERE his reasons for not
starting a relationship with Noa? He certainly liked her enough, and she

>wasn't too bad looking- she did look kinda cute when she got angry. She
was a bit of a ditz, but not so much of one that it made her annoying- it

>just enough to make her fun to bug...

>"Well?" his father prompted.

>"Uh... well..." He could mention that she wasn't a virgin, but that wasn't
really a turn-off for him. At least she'd sort of know what she was doing

>if they ever got that far. What excuse could he give? "She seems more
interested in her labor than she is in a relationship... all she does in

>our off-duty time is polish and clean it. She's even named it 'Alphonse.'"

>Okami frowned. "Surely she's not more concerned with labors than she is
with people."

>
Asuma raised an eyebrow. "She wouldn't be the first person I knew who felt

>that way."

>Okami grit his teeth. "Never mind- it seems as though we really CAN'T talk
about anything without fighting."

>
Asuma shrugged. "Actually, I've finished lunch already. Maybe I should go

>before we get into a bigger fight, huh?"

>Okami opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it.

"Perhaps
you'd better." Asuma got up and started to leave. "Wait, son!" Asuma

>stopped, not looking behind him. "Could we maybe... things weren't too bad
today, were they? Maybe we could get together again at your birthday in

>March?"

>Asuma didn't say anything for a moment. "Maybe. I wasn't thinking about
celebrating it at all, but maybe." With that, he left.

>
"Tsukai," Okami called after giving Asuma enough time to leave.

>
"Yes, Mr. Shinohara, sir?"

>
"You heard and saw how Asuma was acting when he was talking about that Noa

>girl. What do you think?"

>"He appears quite infatuated with her, but seems afraid to build on

their
relationship into something greater, sir."
>
Okami nodded. "Indeed- that is what I thought as well.
Perhaps..."
>
"Perhaps?"
>
"Well, it would be rude of me not to provide the Izumi family
with a dowry,
>wouldn't it? It may be some time before they'll need it however, so
could
you contact my lawyers? I'd like to talk to them about
making a small
>change in my will..."

>* * * * *

>Noa was waiting for him when he got back. "Welcome back, Asuma," she
said
nervously. "How... how did your meeting with your father go?"

>
He blinked. "How did you know I was with my dad?"
>
'Oops. Didn't mean to let him know Hiromi told me that,' Noa
thought.
>"Er... it was the only place I could think that you would go on an
off day
dressed like that."
>
"Ah... well, I guess it didn't go too bad for a meeting with my
father. We
>left on a better note than we usually do...."

>"Well, that's good!" Noa exclaimed enthusiastically. "What did you
talk
about?"
>
"Oh... this and that," Asuma replied, making it obvious he
didn't want to
>discuss it.

>Noa took a deep breath. "Asuma, there are some things I wanted to
talk to
you about today that we weren't able to because of your
meeting with your
>father."

>"Like what?"

>Noa gestured to a chair. "Asuma... I want to know what you think
about
what I said last night."
>
Asuma feigned ignorance. "Er... last night?"
>
"You know... when I told everyone I wasn't some pristine maiden
and all?"
>
"Oh... that." Asuma had really hoped she wouldn't bring that up.

>
"Yeah, that," Noa replied matter-of-factly. "Does knowing I'm
not a
>virgin... change anything between us?"

>When Asuma thought about it, though, it really didn't matter. Still,
he
wanted to know some things. "Well, I don't think so. Was...
it... with
>anyone I know?"

>"No!" Noa exclaimed. "It was years ago- I was sixteen at the time,
and he
was this dreamy eighteen year old boy named Ouki Hamaki.
When he asked me
>out, it was a dream come true... until he... kind of... forced me
into it."

>Asuma's eyes burned in anger. "He raped you?"

>Noa shook her head. "Not quite... but I really felt intimidated into
it.
Like if I hadn't said 'yes' he would have hurt me. I dumped
him the next
>day... My dad was furious- he's wanted me to get married for a long
time
now- but when, a few months later, we found out that Ouki had
joined the
>Yakuza... well, let's just say dad got over it."

>"What happened to him?"

>"I don't know," Noa said. "I didn't keep track of him after that."

>"Well," Asuma growled with determination, "If he ever meets up with me,
he'll regret it."
>
Noa couldn't help it- she giggled. He was so defensive of her... Perhaps
>he would be willing to... "There was something else I wanted to talk to
you about..."
>
"Oh?"
>
"Yeah..." Noa took a real deep breath. "Asuma, I want to..." Suddenly,
>she froze. Could she really ask this? What would she do if he said no?
In fact, what would she do if he said YES?
>
"Noa? You awake?" Asuma prompted, a smile on his face.

>
"Uh, yeah! It's just that... god, this is difficult to ask."

>
"That's okay," Asuma said, the smile still on his face in an encouraging
>manner. "Just ask it."

>"Right," Noa said. Taking another deep breath, she finally blurted it out.
 "Asuma, I want to change our relationship a bit..."

>
Asuma's face was frozen in shock- still smiling, of course. "You... do?"
>
Noa panicked a bit- he wasn't taking this well at all. "Not much! Just a
>little... I'd like to start thinking of the things we go out and do not as
just 'hanging out,' but maybe... as... dating. You know...
boyfriend-girlfriend sort of dating."

>Asuma was still in shock. "Ah... I see."

>Noa started freaking out. This wasn't good at all- he just stood there,
his face unchanging. He wasn't even able to speak. "If you want to... and
>if it doesn't work out, we can always try and stay just friends..."

>After not moving for nearly a full minute, Asuma finally got over his
shock. Laughing nervously, Asuma kept smiling. "Ya know, it's funny- you
>were asking about what dad and I were talking about. One of the things we
discussed was why I wasn't dating you even if I wanted to..."
>
This time, it was Noa's turn to freeze in shock. "Oh?"

>
"Yeah. And you know what? There was exactly one reason I could think of."
> Asuma decided not to mention Alphonse- obviously, he was wrong about that
one.
>
After a few seconds pause of her own, Noa asked, "And that was?"

>
"Well... it's against regulations for two people in the same division to
>have intimate relations."

>Noa's eyes widened. "Oh, no! Then that means-"

>"Relax!" Asuma soothed, putting his hands on her shoulders to help calm
her. "Everyone in the SV2 thinks we're going out, anyway- as long as we're
>subtle about it- or should I say as long as we STAY subtle about it- no-one
will say anything."

>
Noa inched further into his arms. "Are you sure?"
 >
Asuma took another step in, and wrapped her up in a gently hug.

>"Positive."

 >Watching them from the door (and providing an unasked for look-out)
 Hiromi
smiled.

>
* * * * *

>
"So, are we all agreed with the plan?"
 >
"Yes. Asuma Shinohara MUST be punished!"
 >
"Then it's settled. Operation Let's Get Vengeance for Natsume is on!"

>
In the small storage room, the gathering of SV2 labor mechanics cheered.

>

>Next Episode: The creature comforts of Asuma's command car are failing,
and little disasters are going on everywhere around him. How many of the
 >members of the maintenance squad will be thrown into the sea when Chief
Sakaki finds out? And what will happen if one of the pranks goes too far?

>-----

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 fanfics available at

><http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

9. Episode 09: The Curse of the Mechanics

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 09: The Curse of the Mechanics

>
January 14, 2000

>
Asuma stared up at the ceiling of his dorm room, his face twisted in

>frustration. For the past seven days, he'd tried to sleep on a wet bunk
with water dripping on his face. Repeated calls to the maintenance squad

>had gone unanswered, he could not move the bed because it was bolted down,
he discovered his bed was leaning in such a way to make it impossible for

>him to sleep with his head at the other end of the bed, and there were no
more available dorm rooms. He'd tried stapling some plastic to the

>ceiling, but the night after he did that the plastic burst open and all the
water that had dammed up splashed down and woke him up. In fact, he'd

>barely been able to get any rest over the whole week. Thankfully, there
hadn't been any calls in that time, due in part to a heavy snowstorm on the

>Eighth that had shut down most of the construction projects from which most
labor crimes were generated.

>
beep *beep* *beep* his alarm sounded. Sighing, he reach over and slammed

>it off. Rolling out of the bunk, he rubbed his eyes tiredly.

Grumbling
inarticulately, he flipped on the light switch. With a

pop, one of the two

>fluorescent bulbs that had still been working burned out.

>"Dammit!" Asuma cried. "Is EVERYTHING falling apart around here?"
He
closed his eyes, counted to ten, and opened up his closet to pull out a

>uniform. At least those were undamaged.

>He quickly got dressed and left for the maintenance office.

>"Ah, Shige, you're here," Asuma said.

>Shige looked up from the papers on his desk. "Oh, boy. What is it this
time? Another bulb burned out?"

>
Asuma nodded. "And that leak over my bed STILL hasn't been fixed."

>
Shige frowned as he handed him a set of maintenance request forms. "That's

>weird- I sent out the work order for it a week ago. If it hasn't been
repaired by tonight, let me know and I'll come over and fix everything up

>personally. I might do it anyway- it sounds like something's wrong with
the wiring in your room. It's rare that seven bulbs burn out in a week."

>
"Thanks, Shige." Asuma filled out the forms and went on to the office.

>
When he got there, only Noa was in the room. She smiled at him and said,

>"Good morning, Asuma."

>"Morning," he grunted back moodily.

>Noa frowned. That didn't sound good. "They STILL haven't fixed that leak
over your bunk?"

>
Asuma yawned, shaking his head. "No. And Captain Gotoh still hasn't found

>anywhere else for me to sleep. Shige promised me he'd fix it himself if it
wasn't repaired by tonight, but my bed is going to need to be cleaned and

>dried before it'll be a comfortable place to sleep in again."

>Noa thought about it for a second. Looking down shyly, she suggested, "If
you want, we could trade rooms for a while. You could get a good night's

>sleep in my room while I see if I can get anything done about your room."

>Asuma thought about it for a second. He was tempted, but he knew that
would be a rather bad idea- labor pilots needed their sleep more than

>command car operators did. That wasn't why he hesitated, though.

>No, he was hesitating because just seven days before, their relationship
had suddenly changed. With no warning that he could see, either. Now,

>instead of just being really good friends, they were something... more.
How much more, however, was rather confusing. They were pretty much acting

>towards each other just as they had before, though there was both a
nervousness and a giddiness they experienced whenever they were

>together. But that was it- they weren't doing any more or any less than
they had before. They hadn't even kissed yet.

>
Asuma, however, was thinking of suggesting something a bit more than

>kissing. At that moment, the idea of sharing a bed with Noa entered his
head. Perhaps if he hadn't been so tired, he would have remembered that it
>was a very silly thing to think about- after all, they were trying to keep
their relationship a secret, and it would be very hard to not be noticed as
>sleeping in the same room. Still, he thought about it.

>And immediately discarded that thought. It wasn't time yet- they'd just
started 'officially' dating (though as he and Noa had talked about it the
>day after she'd confronted him with her desire to advance their
relationship, they'd started to realize they'd been UNofficially dating for
>some time), and neither of them were going to be ready for that step for
some time. Even just sharing a large hotel room alone would make her
>uncomfortable, considering her past. He remembered the time they'd had to
share a room together on an assignment, and how paranoid she'd been. He
>briefly wondered if it was because of that Ouki Hamaki person she'd told
him about.
>
"No, I don't think that would be a good idea...." Glancing around to make
>sure no-one else was around, he wrapped his arms around her gently and gave
her a very brief squeeze. "Thanks anyway."
>
A clicking announced someone turning the doorknob, and suddenly Asuma was
>on the other side of the room, sitting at his desk and looking as if he'd
been going over his morning paperwork for several minutes. Noa, in the
>meantime, stood frozen right where they'd been, and blushed lightly when
she realized they'd almost been caught.
>
Gotoh stepped in and looked around. Smirking slightly at Noa's expression,
>he turned to Asuma.

>"Shinohara! You've been bugging me for a week for some temporary quarters.
You still want them?" he asked.
>
"Are you kidding?" Asuma asked. "I haven't been able to get a good night's
>sleep in a long time! Of course I do...."

>Gotoh nodded. "Good. I have an assignment you and Noa can volunteer for,
if you want. It'll be rather boring, I expect, and I'd usually give this
>sort of thing to Takeo, since she's a Lieutenant, but then again we haven't
been doing much around here for the past week anyway and you need somewhere
>new to sleep...."

>Asuma looked at his captain suspiciously. "And I assume that the temporary
quarters go along with the assignment. What is it?"

>
"Well, our mechanics have been invited to perform a demonstration of labor
>maintenance in Yokohama. We were thinking of sending a team of mechanics,
a labor pilot, a command car operator, and Labor 3. I was thinking with
>your bunking problems, you might be willing to go..."

>Asuma thought about it for a second. Getting out of his room for a while
would be... delightful. But should he answer for Noa, as well, in this
>case? After all, if their relationship was... more than it was

before,
should he be speaking for her all the time, like before?
He needed to buy
>some time to think about this...

>"Is there some reason we're not using Alphonse for this?" he
asked.

>"Well, Labor 3 is already in pieces- if we were to bring Alphonse
along,
the mechanics would have to disassemble him first."

>
Asuma saw Noa flinch. "Well, okay. I agree taking Alphonse apart
would be
>a bad idea. Um...." He looked around for inspiration. His eyes
finally
rested on Noa, who nodded at him. Did that mean she
wouldn't mind going,
>or that she'd do whatever he wanted, or what? Well, he usually made
the
decisions for both of them- why would it be any different now?
"How long
>would we be gone?"

>Gotoh shrugged. "The conference is three days long. You'd leave
tonight.
You'd stay through the conference, put the labor through
some
>high-performance tests after the mechanics are done reassembling it,
and
come back the morning of the 18th. A basic milk-run."

>
Asuma glanced once more at Noa to make sure he wasn't doing
anything she
>didn't want done, and nodded. "Okay, one trip to Yokohama it is. But
make
sure Shige fixes that leak above my bunk, and for Noa... get
someone to
>keep Alphonse nice and polished while we're gone." He looked at her.

"Okay with you?"
>
Noa did a quick doubletake. Asuma was asking if it was okay with
her? She
>couldn't remember a time he'd ever actually asked her that before.
In
fact, she couldn't remember a time he'd ever let her make ANY
decision
>before- not even what to eat. Perhaps he was being more
considerate
because they were now more than just friends, and
perhaps THAT meant he was
>going to really try to take their relationship ser-

>"Why are you blushing, Izumi?" Gotoh asked.

>"Uh, um... no reason, sir. I don't usually like leaving Alphonse,
but if
someone makes sure to polish him every day, I won't mind."

>
Gotoh nodded. "Good. Head to Chief Sakaki's office- he'll give
you
>details about where it is and who you need to take. Hiromi will
also
likely be coming along, but I still have to talk to him."

>
"Yes, sir!" they both said, saluting, before nearly bolting out
the door.
>
Gotoh's face cracked into a sly smile after they left. "Oh, so
THAT'S what
>they talked about..."

>* * * * *

>Noa reached out and touched the small cloud of mist formed from her
breath.
"Cold here in the command car." Usually, she rode with
Hiromi in the
>labor transport, but since there was no actual labor she might need
to get
into this time, she didn't need to be up in it and could
choose whether to

>take the car or the truck. Obviously, she chose the car- Hiromi was nice
and all, but she'd much rather spend her time with Asuma... at least until

>she saw if this relationship would work out. Right now, though, she was
wondering if the company was worth it. "Does it usually take this long to

>heat up?"

>Asuma shook his head. "I think I've got some sort of curse or something.
First, everything starts going wrong in my dorm room. Now, the heater is

>malfunctioning in my car. What next?"

>Noa hesitantly reached up and squeezed his shoulder. "Relax- everything
will be fine by the time we get back. It's just a coincidence."

>
Asuma spared a second to smile at her reassuringly. "I'm okay, but this is

>starting to get ridiculous. I just hope it isn't some sort of divine
punishment for falling for you." Suddenly, he realized what he said. "Er,

>I didn't mean that."

>Noa tensed for a moment. It sort of made sense- all the incidents started
after she'd told him she wanted a deeper relationship, and they'd both seen

>enough weird things to not believe that there may be some sort of divine
being out there. Still, what was so wrong with their maybe feeling

>something for each other? Surely it couldn't be that... still, she felt it
important to reassure him.

>
"Didn't mean what?" she said. "That you fell for me? Or that this

>situation with your equipment failing is getting ridiculous?"

>He didn't say anything for a second. "No, I was saying that I didn't mean
I was being punished by the gods for seeing you. But even if I was, I

>wouldn't let it stop me."

>"Asuma!" Noa gasped happily.

>He shifted uncomfortably. None of what he was saying felt natural. He
meant it, but it didn't feel natural- it wasn't the sort of thing he would

>say. He might grow into it after a while, but he still didn't feel
comfortable saying any of it. He wasn't one to show his deeper feelings

>through his words, but rather through his actions.

>Noa trembled slightly from the cold, and Asuma noticed. Once they reached
a stoplight, he removed his jacket and, without word, handed it to her.

>
"Take it," he said. "As tired as I am, it's probably better for me that

>it's cold, since I'm driving."

>Noa looked at him gratefully, and snugged the jacket on. Asuma smiled
slightly.

>
'Now THAT'S more my style,' he thought to himself.

>
* * * * *

>
Shige flipped on the switch for the light in Asuma's room. The fluorescent

>light came on- and then immediately burned out.

>"Huh... looks like a really BAD electrical problem. Odd that it's centered
on this one room, though.... I should probably go and turn off the fuse,

>and then grab a flashlight to check it out." Flipping off the switch, he
turned and ran back to his room to get some electrical gloves.
>
A fellow engineer intercepted him on the way.
>
"Shige," he said. "Come quick! Officer Ohta was training in one of the
>Type 96, and it froze up on him. We've gotta get it started again so he
can get the door open!"
>
Shige sighed. "This can wait... at least Asuma's not gonna be needing that
>room for a couple of days." With that, he ran off to help Ohta.

>* * * * *

>"Do you want rollaway beds or futons?" the hotel clerk asked. It was a
Western-style hotel, and a rather elegant one at that. Most of the
>mechanics from the SV2 were impressed- it was the best hotel many of them
had ever stayed in. As a matter of fact, it was the only hotel in the area
>that was equipped to handle a convention of the size of the one they were
attending.
>
Asuma blinked. "Excuse me?"
>
"Well, you have three rooms for eleven people. We only have two beds in
>each room, so five of your party's people will need to sleep on either
rollaways or futons."
>
Asuma looked behind him to Noa, Hiromi, and the gathered mechanics. All of
>them shrugged. "Um, I guess we'll take futons."

>The hotel clerk nodded, and typed a few things into her computer. "Very
good, sir. Here are your room keys- two for each room. Rooms 516 and 517
>are connected, and Room 526 is across the hall from them."

>Asuma took the six plastic cards that were shoved into his hand, and turned
around.
>
"Um... okay, I guess you guys will take the two connected rooms," he
>proposed to the mechanics, handing them four of the keys. "Noa, Hiromi and
I will take room 526."
>
"Uh, right," one of the mechanics said. "Good plan! Come on, guys, let's
>go find our rooms!" With that, they ran off towards the nearest elevator,
leaving Asuma, Noa, and Hiromi in their dust.

>
"They seemed to really like those rooming arrangements," Hiromi pondered,
>grabbing all of his bags and some of Noa's.

>Asuma thought about it for a second. "Probably need to use the bathroom
badly," he suggested crassly. "So what are we supposed to do here while
>we're waiting for them to need us?"

>"I think we're not supposed to do anything tonight. The convention isn't
supposed to start until tomorrow," Noa said, picking up some of her bags.
>
Asuma sighed, put his own bag around his shoulder, and started leading them
>towards the elevator. "Yeah, okay... but what are we supposed to do
tomorrow, while the convention is underway?"
>
"Well, we could try and see what the convention has to offer,"

Noa offered.

> "Chief Sakaki allowed me to learn a few of the basics about mechanics, and
you always seem to know the details of the latest advances in labor

>design..."

>"Are you sure that's a good idea? I don't seem to be having the best of
luck with the sorts of things this convention deals with lately."

>
Noa giggled happily and hugged Asuma's free arm to her. He stiffened- not

>only were they in public, but Hiromi, one of their fellow officers with the
SV2, was watching. Didn't she realize that they might get caught if she

>were to do something like that?

>"Ah, are you afraid of the big nasty tools and motors?" she cooed. "Don't
worry, I'll protect you."

>
"Gah!" Asuma cried, retreating from her grasp. "No, I'm not afraid of the

>tools. Sheesh!" She pouted up at him. "Okay, okay," he relented.

"We'll
look around the show tomorrow- but we might as well do something else while

>we're here, too. We basically have the day off- we could go to the movies
or something."

>
That time, it was Noa who stiffened. She hadn't even thought of the

>possibility of going out on a date- their first 'real' date, even.

"Um...
YEAH! Let's go to a movie tomorrow night. Any suggestions?"

>
Asuma thought about it for a second. Noa usually liked mecha movies- she'd

>gone ga-ga over the Nadesico movie they'd seen a while back- however, he
couldn't think of any movies of that sort that they hadn't seen before. He

>considered the options.

>They could go see a horror movie. Horror movies were generally considered
good date movies because, at scary moments, girls would (in theory) grab

>hold of their date to 'protect' them. He didn't particularly like horror
movies, himself, however- he'd seen enough horror in his life- and he

>doubted Noa would like them, either.

>They could go see a romance movie. He didn't know about Noa, but most
women loved those mushy stories about a boy and a girl falling for each

>other. The problem with that was that he would probably fall asleep before
the end, and that probably wouldn't be a good thing.

>
They could go to an action movie- both of them would probably like that.

>However, action movies weren't exactly date movies. If they were going to
think of this as a date, they should try something else.

>
Which only left comedies. A comedy might be good- getting a girl laughing

>would be a good thing on a date, provided the girl is not laughing AT her
date. They'd both be able to enjoy it, at least.

>
"We should check the movie listings tonight to see what's playing

>tomorrow," he suggested, "But how about we try and find a comedy to go to?
And maybe go out to dinner before that?"

>
Noa smiled. "That sounds like a good idea- lets go dump this stuff we're
>carrying in our room and go see if we can find a newspaper!"

>Hiromi, quietly following them, smiled slightly. Everyone seemed to forget
about him when he wasn't needed- which was fine with him. It allowed him

>to get insights into his friends that he otherwise wouldn't get. It had
actually surprised him when Shinohara seemed to be concerned about his

>presence when Izumi had hugged his arm.

>Right now, he felt a little like a proud father- Izumi and Shinohara had
worked out their differences (thanks, in part, to his advice- he thought),

>and it now sounded like they were going out on another date.

Considering
what he'd overheard them talking about last week, this was probably a REAL

>date for them. He sincerely hoped nothing would go wrong.

>* * * * *

>A council of mechanics had gathered together in room 516, and started
discussing their plans.

>
"Are you certain we haven't done enough?" one of them said.

>
"NO!" the other seven growled. "Asuma must pay for having yelled at the

>beautiful and cute Natsume Kawai, and being cruel to all women everywhere!
So have we vowed!"

>
"Well, of course he does," the first one said, trying to sound reasonable.

>"But, well, we've already made it nearly impossible to sleep for a week, we
thrust him into darkness, and we have taken away the creature comforts of

>the command car."

>"That's not enough!" a different mechanic said. "We must make him suffer
more!"

>
"Yes, more!" another one agreed. "He's escaped his punishment by coming

>with us to his convention, so we must add on to them! Double the load we
had originally intended!"

>
"No, triple it!"

>
"Make his life a living hell!"

>
"And we do it all for the beloved Natsume Kawai!" they all, including the

>one dissenter (caught up in the moment), chorused.

>"So, let's get down to making plans..."

>* * * * *

>January 15, 2000

>"See?" Noa said as they approached their room. She was following Asuma,
who held a bag full of papers, pens, pins, business cards, and other sample

>items collected from the convention tables. "I told you that it wouldn't
be that bad. You haven't been dripped on, frozen, or sent into the dark

>all day, have you?"

>He smiled slightly, digging through his pockets for their keycard. "No, I
guess I haven't. Let's drop this stuff off and freshen up before we head

>out- do you want to use the bathroom first or should I?"

>"You use it first- I need a couple of minutes to pick something to wear."

>Asuma sighed slightly as he pulled out the key. They were dressed fine-
neither of them were in uniform, and he was dressed up pretty decently.
>She'd look good in anything, but that blouse and pants set fit her very
well. Why did women always have to spend so much time trying to decide
>what to-

>"Aagh!" he screamed immediately after grabbing the door handle, stumbling
backwards.
>
"Asuma!" Noa cried, reaching out to steady him. "What's wrong?!"

>
Asuma shook his head, trying to clear it. "I got shocked- and not just
>like a static spark, either- it felt like I was caught by Alphonse's
electromagnetic baton."
>
Across the hall, a door opened up. A group of the SV2's mechanics ran out
>the door.

>"We heard a shout," one of them said. "Is something wrong?"

>"Yeah," Asuma said. "Something's wrong with my door handle- it nearly
electrocuted me when I tried to open it."
>
"Really?" another mechanic, this one an electronics expert, said. "Let me
>take a look at it- maybe I can figure out what's wrong with it."

>"Be my guest," Asuma offered, gesturing to the offending door latch.

>"My tools," the electrician said. Immediately, a toolbox was placed in his
hands. Donning some rubber gloves, he pulled out a screw driver and neatly
>popped the case off the electronic lock. "Looks like a short in the
electronic lock that's being conducted through the metal of the door knob
>somehow- I'll be able to fix it in a couple of hours."

>"Hours?" Noa cried.

>"'Fraid so."

>"Then can Asuma and I use your bathroom to freshen up? We were planning to
go out tonight, and I'm not letting this stop us!" she cried, determination
>written in her face.

>"Uh..." The engineers looked at each other as if to ask a question of
everyone. Finally, one of them spoke up. "I don't think there's a problem
>with that, no."

>One engineer led them into the room while the other four that were gathered
huddled around outside.
>
"I didn't know they were planning on a date tonight!" one of them said in a
>hushed tone. "I certainly didn't mean to inconvenience Noa."

>"I say it's all right to inconvenience her a little, this time. We have to
get her out of the grasp of the dreaded Shinohara! She has such a fine
>appreciation of labor mechanics that she deserves someone better than him."

>"What are you suggesting?" the others whispered.

>"Isn't it obvious?" he said. "We must ruin this date- make it go so badly
that they'll break up with each other, and she'll finally be

free of him!"

>
"I don't know..." one of them, the dissenter from the previous night, said

>hesitantly. "I mean, if we do that, it might hurt Noa, and then would we
be any better than Asuma?"

>
"We aren't trying to hurt her- it's tough love!"

>
"But-"

>
"Look, if it bothers you that much, than stay here- but the rest of us are

>going to be working on ridding the world of that enemy to women
everywhere!"

>
The dissenter stared at him, wide-eyed. 'Ridding the world? How far does

>this guy plan on taking all of this?'

>* * * * *

>Shige studied the pipes over Asuma's bed in shock. Sure, it was weird that
all of the fluorescent bulbs in the room were incompatible with the slots

>they were put in, causing them to burn out quickly, but that might have
been a mistake made on the requisitioning forms. This, however, was

>obvious vandalism.

>There was a very small hole drilled into the plumbing, and around that hole
a piece of towel had been fastened. The result was a very slow leak onto

>Asuma's bed, with no apparent loss of water pressure.

>But why would someone want to do THAT? Confused, Shige proceeded to patch
the hole. He'd have to ask someone about that later, but the first

>priority was to stop the leak before it got worse...

>* * * * *

>Noa frowned at Asuma. He didn't seem to be paying attention to her, and
had seemed awfully listless when he was ordering his food. She wondered if

>he was distracted by something or just bored. If he was distracted by
something, though, it was her job to find out what and see if she could

>help, and if he was just bored... well, it was STILL her job to try and
help. That was what a girlfriend did, right?

>
"Asuma, what's wrong?" she asked, biting back the fear that she just wasn't

>interesting enough for him.

>"Huh? Oh, sorry- I was just thinking about that short in the door, and all
these other things that have been happening to me."

>
Noa sighed- that was his 'I'm coming up with a plan' voice. The last time

>she'd heard him use it, he wound up leaving her stranded at a pizza place-
after having left behind the pizza. True, that WAS a pretty serious

>situation- the virus in the Hyper Operating System could easily have caused
an army of labors to wipe out Tokyo. Still, she'd been rather annoyed at

>that.

>As she was watching, however, he visibly dropped that mindset. "I'm sorry-
I shouldn't be thinking about things like that right now, should I? I

>should be thinking about you."

>It still seemed obviously strained, however. "Are you sure you want to?"
Noa asked. "It sounds like you'd rather think about your

problems than

>me."

>"Huh?"

>"I can hear it in your voice. And not just now- every time you say
something nice to me, it sounds so forced, and you shied away when I tried

>to hug you by the elevators yesterday..." Small tears started to form in
Noa's eyes. This wasn't at all how she pictured it- she'd thought Asuma

>liked her and cared about her, and so trying to build their relationship
would make him happy, but instead it seemed as if he was treating it all as

>some unwelcome obligation. "Maybe... maybe this just isn't going to work
out, and we should go back to being 'just friends' before we carry things

>too far... I mean, this is just our first real date, so we shouldn't have
too much trouble forgetting I ever said anything about us..."

>
Asuma panicked. He wanted this new relationship to work out- it was

>perhaps the best thing he had going for him- but because he felt awkward
trying to talk to Noa about it, he was about to lose it.

He had to say

>something.

>"Noa, I..." He hesitated. How could he repair the damage done? How could
they start over? Suddenly, those two words clicked in his head- start

>over. "I'm going to say some things- they might hurt, but I hope when I'm
done saying them you and I will feel better, because right now I think

>we're BOTH pretty miserable."

>Noa sniffed. This was it- he was going to tell her once and for all it was
impossible, and break up with her. Such a silly thing, thinking she might

>actually have been able to get someone she cared about like Asuma to ever
feel anything for her...

>
"Maybe you're partly right. Maybe this relationship isn't going to work

>out," Asuma said.

>Noa gasped. This was it. Her worst nightmare, coming true...

>"But I don't think we can go back to being 'just friends.'"

>No, it was WORSE than her worst nightmare. She was even going to lose his
friendship.

>
"See, Noa, I've sort of liked you 'that way' for quite some time- almost

>ever since I saw you when you were trying to find the Labor Aptitude Test
nearly a year ago, now- and now that I've found out that you maybe share a

>little bit of that feeling too, I don't want to just set it aside and stamp
it down, any more."

>
Eh? What was that?

>
"But, see, the problem is I don't know how to treat you now that I know you

>like me. I don't know how to give you compliments, even if I feel you
deserve them and believe them. I really think that you are more worth

>thinking about and talking about than any stupid problems I'm having, but I
just have so much trouble actually SAYING something

like that it feels
>forced."

>"Asuma?" Noa marveled. He wasn't breaking up with her... but what WAS he
doing?
>
"I've been trying to make you happy, even if it means saying things that I
>feel real uncomfortable saying. But... I'm not going to do that any more."
He looked at Noa. "I may insult or tease you a bit, and not treat you
>right, but that's just who I am. If you can take that and still want to be
my... well, I guess girlfriend is the best word- if you can take that, then
>maybe this relationship will work out."

>Noa thought about that. Well, she really hadn't seen THAT much change in
him the past week, outside of his being nervous. And more polite. And
>he'd been asking for her input on certain decisions that affected them
which he'd usually just make on his own. Okay, maybe he had been trying to
>change.

>But she didn't ask him to make any of those changes. She kind of liked it
when he was bossy at times- it almost felt like a game, and she never was
>one to ask for compliments to be showered down upon her. The changes were
things he'd decided to do himself. While they might have been a pleasant
>surprise, she didn't really need them- so, of course, there was no decision
to make.
>
"Asuma, I asked if we could try this out knowing that you've been a jerk to
>me in the past, and I fully expect you to be one to me sometimes even
though we go out on real dates and things. So of course I can accept it,"
>she said. Asuma looked relieved, until a teasingly devilish smile appeared
on Noa's face- a smile which he hadn't seen very often before. Well, he
>had, but it was when she was teasing him about HIS toothaches after all the
teasing he had done over hers, and so he really hadn't bothered to memorize
>it. "So, if you liked me all this time, why haven't you done anything
about it until now?"
>
Asuma blinked. "You know, my father asked me the same thing- if I liked
>you, why weren't we going out. I couldn't really get an answer for him,
except for the stupid laws about people in the same police division not
>dating." He chuckled. "He said he didn't think I'd let that stop me- and
it didn't."
>
Now Noa really was curious- she'd just been teasing before. "Well, what
>DID stop you?"

>'Just don't mention Alphonse,' a tiny part of his brain warned. "I don't
really know," he said. "Maybe because-"
>
Thankfully, he didn't have to come up with an answer as their waiter came
>up to them in that moment.

>"I'm terribly sorry, sir," the waiter said. "But we can't fill your order
today. For some reason, the gas has been turned off and so we are unable
>to cook any food until the gas company has sent someone to check it

out.
We sincerely apologize for this inconvenience, and any
drinks you have
>ordered are complimentary."

>Asuma's eye twitched. "The gas is out?" The waiter nodded. "Figures.

Okay, thank you." The waiter turned and left.
>
Noa pouted. "Now what are we going to do about dinner?"

>
Asuma checked his watch and sighed. "Well, we don't have time to
go
>anywhere else- we'll just finish our drinks and see if we can
find
somewhere to eat after the movie."
>
Noa smiled slightly. "Sounds good. Oh, and Asuma?"
>
"Yeah, Noa?"
>
"You aren't the only person who doesn't know why they waited so
long..."
>
* * * * *
>
Chief Sakaki inspected the pipes as Shige babbled on about the
stuff he
>could see for himself. Someone in the SV2 was a saboteur- and, in
this
case, it looked like a practical joker going too far. After
shutting down
>the water to the pipe, he inspected the holes put into it.

>Precision drilling with top-of-the-line tools, measured out
perfectly to
keep the water from flowing too fast yet let it flow
enough to cause a
>steady drip. Centered directly over Asuma's pillow- obviously, the
person
who did this was a mechanic. One of HIS mechanics.

>
"Shige," he said, interrupting his apprentice. "Tell me- do you
know if
>Asuma has done anything that anyone might have taken offense at,
lately?"

>Shige frowned. "Well, last week he snapped at Ms. Kawai, but he
later
apologized to her and she told me she totally understood
what was wrong
>after he'd talked to Noa. It couldn't be her."

>Sakaki nodded. Of course it wouldn't be Kawai- he already knew it
was a
mechanic. But if one of the mechanics thought it would put
them in her
>good graces...

>"Hmm... let everyone know I want to see them one at a time in my
office for
questioning. I'm going to go talk to Gotoh about
something."

>
* * * * *
>
Noa laughed along with the audience at a particularly funny
moment in the
>movie.

>"This movie was a good idea- it helps balance out all the
seriousness at
the restaurant," she whispered to Asuma, leaning up
against him.
>
Asuma stuck a hand behind her head, giving her a gentle
one-armed hug.
>"Well, it wasn't exactly PLANNED that way, but you're right- it
does."

>Noa looked at his hand wrapped around her. "Hmm... you sure you
aren't
pushing yourself right now?"
>
Asuma shook his head. "Nah- it feels too natural."
>
Any further conversation, however, was ruined when the sprinkler
system

>went off, causing cries of outrage and panic to sound out from around the
theater.
>
"Aagh!"
>
"What's going on?!"
>
"I knew I shouldn't have worn this white blouse!"
>
Many people started scrambling for the doorways while the water continued
>to rain down on the theater.

>Noa, with Asuma bent over her and using his body to help shield her from
the downpour, sighed. "I guess your problem is getting worse. Maybe I
>shouldn't have tried to get you to think of me when we were at the
restaurant, and just let you figure out what's wrong."

>
"Oh, I have a few ideas... but let's not worry about that right now. Let's
>concentrate on getting out of here." He sighed. "Sorry our date got
ruined."
>
Noa thought about it. They'd gotten over some issues they had to deal
>with, she'd had a fun time with the part of the movie she'd seen (and it
was silly enough she didn't care about missing the end of it), and now here
>she was, with Asuma holding her while trying to protect her from the fire
sprinklers.
>
"Actually, Asuma," she said, "It might not have gone perfectly, but it
>wasn't that bad."

>* * * * *

>January 16, 2000

>Things had gone rather uneventfully since the end of the date. Dinner, of
course, was out of the question- their clothes had been soaked through, and
>by the time they got into their room and changed all the restaurants had
been closed.
>
As had happened on the night they had arrived, Hiromi spent the night of
>the 15th in the same room as Noa and Asuma, and most of his waking time
with them as they went through some parts of the convention they had missed
>before, as well. The 16th was much the same... At least, he did until
getting a phone call at about noon- after that, he started hanging around
>the engineers all the time.

>And that lead to the current situation. He hadn't returned for the night-
in fact, he'd left a note saying that he wasn't going to be back until the
>next morning. And that meant that Noa and Asuma would have to sleep alone
together in the same room that night, without the relaxing presence of
>Hiromi to chaperone them.

>It was, to say the least, a fairly uncomfortable situation.

>"Well... it's not like we haven't done this before," Noa said hopefully,
trying to stretch her sleeping robe to cover more of her. "I mean,
>remember the time we spend the night at that little inn in Sakata?"

>Asuma glared at her. "Yeah- you hit me."

>"Hey! You were trying to steal Captain Gotoh's hatahata!"

>"I just wanted a midnight snack! I would have replaced what I ate!"

>"Well, I was nervous!"

>Asuma sighed. "And are you nervous now?"

>"Well... a little. But I trust you more, now- I don't think I'll be
hitting you this time unless you do something weird."

>
"Well, that's comforting," Asuma said, peeling back the covers of his bed.
>
Noa chuckled. He looked kinda cute when he was annoyed like that. In fact, it reminded her of something.

>"Say, Asuma, there's something I want to do before we go to bed, and I'll
need your help for it," Noa said, getting one of her determined looks on her face.

>Asuma look up. "Yeah? Ulmph!"

>Reaching up, Noa grabbed him, pulled him down, and gave him a rather deep
kiss full on the lips, her hands running into his hair. After a few seconds, Asuma's arms came around her, and he started returning the kiss.

>Shortly after that, Noa released him and the kiss. "About time- I've been
waiting for a chance to try that," she said. "This was the first time we've been alone and haven't had to worry about someone bursting in on us
in a while. So, how did you like our first kiss?"

>
"Wow. Um, I... uh... just-"
>
Asuma stopped when Noa put a finger over his lips. "Shh- don't try and force anything. I can tell how you feel now."

>With that, she just smiled at him and then crawled into her bed.

"Goodnight, Asuma." She flipped off the light switch.
>
It was several more minutes before Asuma moved again.

>
* * * * *

>
January 18, 2000

>
The mechanics' demonstration on the 17th went off without a hitch, and

>Noa's performance was flawless. Hiromi left Asuma and Noa alone again, but
after having gone through it once they didn't have any real problem with

>it... and Noa once again was able to kiss Asuma goodnight. This time,
however, she wasn't able to surprise him with it.

>
The biggest surprise was that Asuma hadn't had any problems since that date

>night. Now, however, it was time to go home, and he knew he'd have to deal
with a particular problem that hadn't been fixed.

>
"Hey, Noa?" he called, packing the trunk of the command car with their

>bags.

>"Yeah, Asuma?" she said, coming up from having piloted the third labor into
the carrier.

>
"Why don't you ride back with Hiromi? The heater is still busted, and

>there's no reason we should both suffer..."

>"You sure you don't want me in there with you?" she said.

>Asuma chuckled. "Of course I do, but you should just go with Hiromi, so I
won't have to worry about you...."
>
"Worry about me?"
>
"Well, if I think you're going to get cold, I'll feel too guilty and have
>to give you my jacket or something else which will make ME get cold. So,
it's better for both of us if you go with Hiromi."
>
Noa sighed. "Oh, well. I'll see you when we get back home."

>
Asuma chuckled and ruffled Noa's hair playfully. "Hey, we aren't really
>going to be separated by that much, and we're just driving back to work,
anyway. Don't act like we're going on separate vacations or something."
>
Noa shrugged. "It's just that this weekend was so nice since we didn't
>have to hide so much, and it feels like we're going to be... trapped... for
quite a while, so I just... I don't know, I just feel like I'm not going to
>be really seeing you for a while."

>"Okay, if that's how you feel..." He reached over, grabbed her, and not
caring if anyone saw him gave her a quick but intense kiss.
"We have to
>hide it when we're on the base, but that doesn't mean we can't still act
how we feel occasionally. We just have to be careful about it. To prove
>it to you, I promise to give you one of those within a day of getting
back."
>
Noa staggered back a little. That was their first kiss that was even
>remotely close to being public (though it was highly unlikely anyone saw
it), and it affected her a little. Perhaps the thrill of avoiding capture
>would add something to it, instead of just making it more difficult to
relax...
>
"Well, then, we'd better start hurrying back, huh?" With that, she darted
>back to the labor transport and hopped on board.

>Shaking his head, a smile on his face, he stepped into his car.
'Oh,
well... hopefully, the mechanics haven't done anything ELSE to the car
>while we were here. I guess Sakaki found out and they got Hiromi to keep
an eye on them the past few days, but one might have slipped by him... ah,
>well. We'll see.'

>* * * * *

>Asuma had been driving for about a half hour, but had only just gotten out
of Yokohama. Once he did, however, the road in front of him was finally
>clear. Once he reached a long, straight piece of road- a bridge- he
accelerated.
>
The labor carrier wasn't too far behind him, and the van carrying the
>members of the maintenance squad wasn't very far behind that. He wasn't
exactly trying to lose them, but he wanted to get back to SV2 Headquarters
>before Noa did so he could find somewhere 'private' where they could be
together without fear, if they wanted. He had a few ideas, but he had to
>make sure they were, well, clean enough for her before he could

bring her
to them.
>
Suddenly, the back of his seat gave out. Too startled to think about what
>he was doing, his hands left the wheel and his legs came kicking up-
knocking the wheel to the right.
>
In the labor transport behind him, Noa saw Asuma's car swerve off the
>bridge.

>"Noooooooo! Asuma!"

>The command car teetered off the bridge, but didn't fall. However, it was
hanging delicately from the side, and there was no way it could stay there
>for long.

>"Oh, no..." Noa said. "Asuma..." Her face took on that determined look.
"Hiromi! Help me get the labor ready!"
>
* * * * *
>
"Asuma, are you all right?! Asuma!"
>
"Noa?" Asuma muttered. He was lying in his car, strapped into his broken
>seat. A part of the instrument panel had become dislodged and smashed into
his head, but now it was lying on the dashboard in front of him. He could
>see a little blood on the corner that had hit him.

>Noa's voice was now ringing in his ears. "Asuma? Can you hear me?"

>Shaking his head to try and get the cobwebs out, he turned on the
transmitter for his headset. "I read you... what the hell happened?"
>
"You went over a bridge wall... I'm in the labor, but I can't pull you up-
>your car is caught on something down there. Right now, though, I'm at
least able to keep you from falling over the edge. Hiromi's arranging a
>way to get you unhooked..."

>Asuma frowned. "Where are the mechanics?"

>"Um, well, see..."

>* * * * *

>5 Minutes Earlier

>The van with the mechanics drove up just as the labor had reached and
started lifting the command car. Hiromi, wearing a headset in order to
>keep in touch with Noa, was standing there watching. The van stopped, and
everyone in it got out.
>
"What's going on?" one of the mechanics said.
>
"We don't know how it happened," Hiromi said, keeping his eyes on Noa's
>work. "But for some reason his car suddenly spun out of control and nearly
plunged off the bridge. Noa's trying to pull it up, but it appears to be
>caught on something."

>Another mechanic glared at the first one. "I told you that you were going
too far! But no, you said UMPH!"
>
Three other mechanics pounced on him. "What are you doing, man?! You WANT
>to get us all thrown out?"

>They wrestled for a few seconds until one of them looked over at the
wreckage. Asuma's car was now securely held with no danger of falling the
>rest of the way into the water below, but the labor holding it was staring
at the group of mechanics in such a way that the observer

was wondering if
>he and the others had added enough enhancements into it to allow it
to
display the pilot's emotions, as well. At any rate, he
definitely felt the
>labor glaring at them angrily.

>Hiromi had also frozen. It wasn't until he had turned around, and an
anger
that no-one had ever seen on that face before was plainly
visible.
>
"Um... what, exactly, did you do to Asuma?" he said through
gritted teeth.
>
That's right. The gentle giant was REALLY mad.
>
"Um... well, it was just supposed to be a little joke, that's
all..."
>
Hiromi's hands visibly clenched up into fists, and that was all
that was
>needed. In a matter of seconds, the entire story came out- how
Asuma
insulting Natsume had lead to the mechanics declaring war on
him, and how
>this was the latest of a number of tricks they were trying to pull
on him.

>"It was just supposed to make it uncomfortable for him to sit, not
cause an
accident!" the panicked leader was saying.
>
"Well," Hiromi said menacingly. "You people are going to do
something
>about it- like put together a winch to help us safely get the car
off of
whatever's caught it. And next time, before taking
vengeance on someone
>for saying something stupid, you should find out WHY he said it- as
it
happens, Asuma was going to deal with some serious family
problems, and he
>apologized to Ms. Kawai later. But did you bother to find any of
that out?
No- and another thing, damaging the pipes at SV2
Headquarters is serious-
>now, the maintenance dorms aren't going to be getting hot water for
several
days while the pipes in Asuma's room get replaced, and..."

>
* * * * *

>
Back in the present...
>
"...and he went on like that, listing everything that had
happened- they
>even tried to ruin our date because they thought you were going to
mistreat
me!"
>
By this point in her story, they had already recovered the car,
and were in
>an ambulance on the way to the hospital so they could get his head
injury
looked at. There had been several interruptions, of course,
as the winches
>were put to use and the ambulance arrived, but finally she had
reached the
end of the story.
>
"Huh," Asuma said. "I figured it was probably the mechanics- or
at least A
>mechanic- but I didn't know why. I don't even remember what I did
to
Natsume, too..."
>
Noa sighed, dabbing at his cut with a wet cloth as she'd been
instructed to
>by the paramedics. "It certainly wasn't enough to justify this."

>Asuma chuckled. "Don't let it change how you feel about the
maintenance
squad- everyone there treats us pretty good. They just
over-react to some

>things, and sometimes take things too far. It's part of who they are..."
Shaking his head, he continued, "I can't even imagine what Chief Sakaki's
>going to do when he finds out..."

>* * * * *

>The mechanic who had been the one dissenter in the group swam over to their
former leader.
>
"I told you we'd taken things far enough- if it weren't for you overdoing
>it, no-one would have found out."

>"Ya know," the former leader said absently, totally ignoring the comment.
"I never really realized that he was serious when he said he would throw us
>into the sea... I guess I was wrong."

>-----
Next Episode: With a period of unseasonable warmth, two mighty forces
>decide to do battle on the field of softball. Will Ohta stop throwing
fastballs? Will Gotoh actually take an at-bat? Will the game EVER end?

>Find out in Episode

10...

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> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

> <p><p>

10. Episode 10: Gotoh at the Bat

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 10: Gotoh At The Bat

>
January 27, 2000

>
It was an unseasonably warm January day in Tokyo. All of the SV2 was

>off-duty at the moment- all three units had been called to provide
round-the-clock security for some very high-level political negotiations,

>but they had arrived at the site ahead of schedule and had several hours of
time to kill. Noa just happened to have her glove and a softball with her,

>and suggested to Asuma that they head over to a nearby field (belonging to
a high school) and get a game of catch going.

Shortly thereafter, they

>were joined by the rest of the second unit, and finally the other two units
joined in as well. Soon, they were divvying up teams for a friendly little

>match of softball as the three unit captains looked on.

>"So," Noa whispered to Asuma. "Same bets as before?"

>Since coming back from that nearly disastrous engineering and mechanics
conference nearly two weeks beforehand, the two of them had been coming up

>with some sort of daily competition. Whoever lost had to be the one to
find that day's private location, where they could act like the couple they

>were becoming (they had figured that going to the same place all the

time
>might get a little suspicious). This impromptu softball game was a perfect
>opportunity, since they had been made the opposing team captains.
>"Nah," Asuma said, shaking his head. "After our duty shift, we'll be free
to go out on our own, so we don't need to worry about privacy today.
>Instead, let's say whoever loses buys dinner tonight, okay?"

>Noa smiled and nodded. "Deal."
>Gotoh, watching them in the background, sighed. "Oh, to be young again."
>Asuma stiffened, overhearing. He wasn't ENTIRELY sure that Gotoh knew what
was going on, but when he first saw the captain upon returning from the
convention he and Noa had gone to, Gotoh had casually said, "I know what's
been going on for the past week or so. Make sure you don't let it
interfere with your job." While that SEEMED to refer to the incident with
the mechanics, the way Gotoh had said it made Asuma think that he was
referring to something else. The thought that he and Noa might already
have been 'caught' made Asuma a little jumpy, at times.

>"Okay, team," Noa cried as she walked off, bringing him back to the
present. "We'll bat in this order..."
>Soon, Noa's team was up, with Ueki Mashimo, one of Unit 1's transport
officers, on the plate and Natsume Kawai on deck. Ohta was pitching,
>Shinshi was catching, and Asuma was playing shortstop. Officers of the
Riot Squad, who had also been called in to protect this delegation, were
watching from the fence. And the game was on.
>Ohta's first pitch screamed past Ueki, and hit the top of Shinshi's glove
so hard that it ricocheted into his head and knocked him over.
>"Oof!" Shinshi gasped.
>"Nice pitch," Gotoh commented wearily.
>"Yeah... for a baseball game," the riot squad commander said.

>"Throw it underhand, you idiot! UNDERHAND! This is softball!" Ueki
shouted angrily.
>"You're a cop!" Ohta shot back. "You should be expecting anything, and be
able to adapt to any situation!"
>Shinshi sat up dazedly. "Tamiko, did you get the number of the labor that
hit me?"
>"We aren't on duty, you idiot!" Ueki returned to Ohta. "And this isn't the
sort of thing that philosophy applies to!"

>"Tamiko, where are you?" Shinshi muttered, walking around and looking from
person to person.
>"You call yourself a police officer?"
>Shinshi walked up to Natsume, and looked her up and down. "You aren't
Tamiko... what have you done with Tamiko?"
>Natsume blinked. "Um..."
>"Your own catcher wasn't expecting you to throw the ball that

hard! Now

>he's going around calling everyone 'Tamiko!'"

>The riot squad commander, still standing next to Gotoh, laughed.

"No
wonder you guys have such a bad reputation. You're teams can't work

>together at all- you're hopeless!"

>"They aren't that bad, once you get to know them," Gotoh noted.

>"Oh, please. These people couldn't get along if their lives depended on
it! They're utterly incompetent! It's amazing that no-one in the SV2 has

>been killed, yet," the squad commander snorted.

>"Oh? You really think we can't get along?" Gotoh queried, noting that the
other man's voice had caught the attention of a couple of the people

>waiting to hit.

>"I'd be willing to bet on it!"

>"Is that so?" Gotoh said. "How about a little softball match, your riot
squad unit versus the SV2? Seven innings, losing squad treats the winning

>squad to dinner after this assignment is over?"

>The riot squad commander raised an eyebrow at Gotoh. "Anything we want?"

>Gotoh nodded. "Even Tokyo beef, if you want. But you must be prepared to
reciprocate in kind."

>
Tokyo beef! At 15,000 yen a pound, it was one of the most expensive

>available not just in Japan, but anywhere in the world. On a policeman's
salary, it would be VERY difficult to save up enough money to spend it on

>such an extravagant meal. Even the chance to be treated to such a meal was
more than the riot squad commander could even dream of. And what were the

>chances of this disorganized group of misfits defeating his well-trained
and highly competent team? He could almost taste that meal already. A

>thin line of drool escaped out of the corner of his mouth.

>"Are you sure you want to do this? This is your last chance to back
out...." the riot squad commander asked.

>
Gotoh smirked. "That's my line."

>
The riot squad commander raised an eyebrow and nodded. "Very well. A

>match, then. Seven innings of softball. After the assignment has been
completed."

>
Shinshi, still dazed, walked up to Gotoh and grabbed him by the lapels of

>his shirt. The glasses he wore were humming mysteriously as they shined in
the sun. "What have you done with Tamiko?" he demanded.

>
The riot squad commander could barely keep a straight face.

"Good luck,"

>he chuckled.

>* * * * *

>Gomioka raised an eyebrow after hearing Gotoh's request. "Let me get this
straight. You made a bet that you would pay for dinner for the fifty men

>of the Riot Squad- a dinner which could cost you anything- that involved
not just your OWN troop of misfits, but Shinobu's and my units as well?"

>
Gotoh looked at him tiredly. "Um, you expect me to have that much money on
>hand? You and I make pretty much the same salary, you know."

>"Yeah, I know. How do you expect to pay for it? You DO plan to pay for it
if you lose, right?" Gomioka growled.

>
Gotoh coughed. "Well, I plan to pay part of it."

>
"Part of it? Who do you think is going to pay the rest... oh, no. No!

>I'm not having any part of this!"

>Gotoh shrugged. "I didn't ask you to. I have a feeling that everyone will
be willing to help out, however."

>
Gomioka stood proudly. "You may try to talk them into it if you wish, but

>I doubt that you'll be able to talk anyone into following this ridiculous
scheme!"

>
Gotoh shrugged. "If they don't, I can call things off easily enough."

>With that, he left the temporary command station that the SV2 had set up
for the assignment.

>
Shinobu stood up from her chair, tapped the pages of the report she had

>been writing evenly on her desk, and sighed. "Captain Gomioka," she began,
trying to keep a smile from appearing on her face. "You're going to have

>to learn that Gotoh is quite capable of getting people to do what he wants
them to do. He's going to win that game."

>
Gomioka stood up himself. "I'll be shocked if he can even assemble a full

>team for the game. Win it? Ha!"

>* * * * *

>The eighteen men and women who crewed the SV2 limbered up in the baseball
park. The game was only a half hour away, and they needed to be ready.

>After all, this wasn't just about some silly bet- this was about honor.
Joudo Ishikawa and Takeo Kumagami had BOTH heard the captain of the riot

>squad call them all incompetent, and lucky not to be dead. It was probably
at least partially true, but STILL- it was insulting when someone just said

>it like that.

>When Gotoh had come to them, letting them know that there was a chance to
redeem their honor- only risking the cost of paying for a few dinners (not

>thinking how much those dinners might cost, mind), there was little
hesitation. Well, a few people with small bank accounts hesitated a

>little, and Shinshi hesitated a lot, but that was because he was still
hurting from that pitch Ohta through.

>
That changed, though, when a few riot squad officers, carrying some papers

>that Captain Gotoh had asked to be delivered to their captain, came by
while Shinshi's group was getting ready for their shift to start. Ohta,

>thankfully, was unable to hear their taunts from the cockpit of his labor-
he might have been angered to the point of murder, otherwise- but Shinshi

>had no such protection.

>"Oh, look- it's the SV2," the first one noted in a sing-song voice.

"Getting ready to look all impressive in their giant tin cans."

>
"Heh," the second one snorted. "Real men don't need labors to do their
>fighting for them."

>That caught Shinshi's attention.

>"Yeah," a third agreed. "You people in the SV2 aren't real men-
you're
just a bunch of boys. How do some boys like you expect to
beat a bunch of
>men like us?"

>"Excuse me?!" Shinshi replied in a very strained voice, his glasses
singing
as the sun glared off of them.
>
"You heard us!" the first exclaimed. "You BOYS are hopeless!
Give up now,
>and spare yourselves a little dignity."

>The other riot squad members laughed as the first one led them off
to the
makeshift lounge area that had been set up for the off duty
police during
>the visit. Shinshi, however, was not going to let his targets
disappearing
dissuade him from his wrath. Walking over to the
command car, he grabbed
>the radio transmitter.

>"Ohta!" Shinshi barked. "Get out of that labor right now! I'm going
to
get someone else to take over our shift."
>
Ohta was a little surprised at this change of plan. "What? Why?"

>
"When you get out of there, find your glove and ball right away!
We have
>to practice! And we ARE going to win that game, if I have to kidnap
the
rest of the SV2 in order to get them to play!"
>
With that, Ohta was browbeaten into a three hour practice
session that made
>Shinshi into a very respectable- and very determined- catcher.

>That practice was long over, however, and Gotoh was making the last
minute
alterations to the SV2 team's starting line-up while the
four volunteer
>referees from the security guards they and the riot squad had been
working
with looked on. A couple of members seemed a little
reluctant to stand
>anywhere near Shinshi, but that was to be expected- they were the
people
who he had 'convinced' to participate.
>
Gotoh checked something he had written on a piece of paper and
frowned
>slightly. Walking up to Kanuka, he asked, "Hmm... do you know how to
pitch
softball?"
>
Ohta, stretching nearby, fell flat on his face. "WHAT?!" he
cried.
>
Kanuka shrugged. "Softball was never my best sport, but I'm
pretty sure my
>skills are more than adequate for this game."

>Ohta picked himself up off the ground and ran over to Gotoh. "But I
want
to pitch!" he whined, using the same voice he usually used
when begging to
>fire a gun.

>Gotoh shrugged. "I'll put you in as the closer, but I don't think
you've
got an arm that will last for the whole game...."

>
"Of course I do! I spent three hours practicing with Shinshi
yesterday-"
>
"And that is why I don't think you'll have the endurance for

today. You
>already tired out your arm, you won't be able to pitch very
many
pitches...."
>
Ohta facefaulted as soon as he understood what the captain was
saying- he'd
>practiced his way out of playing. Gotoh ignored him and
continued
assigning people to their positions.
>
"Asuma, you'll play shortstop. Noa, you're second base.
Shinshi's
>catcher..."

>* * * * *

>When all was said and done, the SV2 had a rather solid starting
lineup,
even including a third base coach. Hideki Nomo, the old
officer with just
>one hand who drove one of Unit One's labor transports, wasn't able
to play,
but Gotoh was able to convince him to relay his calls to
the base runners
>or onto the field.

>In addition to having Kanuka as the pitcher, Noa and Asuma as the
second
baseman (woman) and shortstop, and Shinshi as catcher,
Gotoh had filled the
>rest of the starting line-up with the most athletic of his team.
Takeo
Kumagami was on first base, the very friendly and
enthusiastic rookie labor
>pilot for Unit One, Koichi Miyagi, was playing third, and in the
outfield
were the mop-haired Ueki Mashimo, the competent and
efficient Yamane
>Seiroku, and Unit One's senior labor pilot Yuhki Watanabe.

>The SV2 retired the riot squad rather quickly in the first inning,
with
three strikeouts being dished out with the minimum number of
pitches thanks
>to Kanuka. She was also the first one to bat, and looped a ball over
the
riot squad's infield to reach first base. Yuhki Watanabe was
up next, but
>was startled by a brush-back pitch that nearly grazed his nose and
played
the rest of his at-bat overcautious. As it turned out, it
didn't matter
>too much, since the pitcher walked him anyway. Next up was Takeo,
who
calmly and coolly stepped up to the bag and smiled as the
pitcher through
>three strikes right past her for the first out.

>Next up was Seiroku, who snorted out of his once-broken nose as
he
approached the plate. The riot squad's catcher, seeing his
opportunity,
>decided to try taunting him good-naturedly.

>"Your mother worked for Beach House!" he said, invoking the name of
one of
the most inept group of terrorists that plagued Japan.

>
Seiroku sniffed. "So?" he said coolly, as the pitcher rose in
his wind-up.
> The pitch came, Seiroku swung, and the ball went flying out of the
park.
Smirking calmly at the catcher, Seiroku took his bases, and
the SV2 was up
>3-0.

>The riot squad captain, in his dugout, slammed his hand against the
water
fountain in frustration. "Dammit!" he growled.

>
"Relax, Cap'n," one of his subordinates soothed. "We'll get
those ones

>back."

>Noa, up next, grounded out to first, and Asuma quickly followed, bringing
the inning to a close. The riot squad went up again, eager to try and

>rally, but once again Kanuka shut them down with three strikeouts-again,
on the minimum nine pitches.

>
This time at the plate, the SV2 didn't do quite so well. Ueki Mashimo hit

>a single, but Shinshi wasn't really ready for batting.

>'Oops,' he thought to himself as he struck out swinging. 'I should have
spent some of that three hours with Ohta yesterday batting and not just

>catching....'

>Koichi Miyagi grounded into a double play, and the second inning was over.

>Once again, Kanuka was as methodical as ever, not letting her opponents
even have a trace of mercy. To say this frustrated the riot squad captain

>didn't exactly do it justice. As his team left the dugout, he pulled his
own pitcher aside to talk to him in secret.

>
"We don't stand a chance while she's still pitching," the captain said,

>gesturing to Kanuka in the on-deck circle. "Hit her- hard. Knock her out
of the game. It's the only way to win."

>
The pitcher looked flustered. "Captain, you can't ask me to-"

>
"Do YOU want to pay for these idiots' food?"

>
"Of course not! But-"

>
"Then this is the only way. Do it... that's an order."

>
The pitcher looked tight-lipped for a moment before nodding slowly. He'd

>do as ordered. Besides, this was softball- there wasn't really any way he
could hurt her seriously with a pitch, was there? The captain wasn't

>thinking straight- he'd see how ridiculous this was once the girl just
shrugged off being hit by the ball. "Yes, sir."

>
He stood up to the plate, and stared over at Kanuka as she waited, the bat

>slung over her shoulder. The pitcher regretted what he had to do- she
looked kind of cute. Well, maybe when this was all over he could take her

>out for drinks, or offer to pay for her share of the dinners as an apology
for what he was going to do. Well, no more time to worry about the

>consequences- it was time to pitch.

>His first pitch was wide to the outside. Best to let them think he was
losing control of his pitches, so that it wouldn't seem so intentional.

>Kanuka smirked, and the pitcher took a deep breath. Wind-up, deliver....

>With a meaty thump, the ball crashed right into Kanuka's eye, knocking her
down. The pitcher didn't need to fake horror at the strike- he hadn't mean

>to hit her nearly so hard, so when she fell, he let out a shocked gasp.

>"Ack- no! I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," he cried, running up to make sure she
was okay. "Are you all right?"

>
He was stopped when she sat up and glared at him out of one eye,

barely
>restrained anger showing in her face. She slowly stood up and
dusted
herself off.
>
'Hmm,' the pitcher thought to himself as he stumbled back to the
mound. 'I
>don't think she's going to go for a make-up coffee.'
>Gotoh slowly strode his way from the dugout to home plate. "Can you
still
play?" he asked.
>
Kanuka shook her head. "Not as a pitcher- I won't be able to see
the plate
>clearly. I'll run the bases, but get Ohta warmed up."

>Gotoh sighed. "Do you think he's up to it?"

>Kanuka shrugged. "If he remembers that this is a softball game." Her
good
eye narrowed, directing itself at the Riot Squad's pitcher.
"He did that
>intentionally."

>Gotoh nodded. "It wasn't his idea."

>Kanuka nodded, redirecting her gaze at the Riot Squad captain. "I
know."

>* * * * *

>Kanuka, at the direction of the umpire, walked over to first base.
Yuhki
walked up to the plate, remembering how he'd nearly been hit
himself the
>first time up to the plate. He struck out despite the fact that
the
pitcher was rattled by his own pitch, too worried to get close
enough to
>the plate.

>Kumagami walked up to the plate, and this time her calm smile was
gone.
The ball came in, and with a crack went back out.
Unfortunately, it didn't
>quite go far enough- it was caught at the fence for another out.

>Seiroku was next up. He was calm as he waited for the pitch, and
smacked
the ball out of the park for his second home run of the
game.
>
Noa came up next. She was starting to get mad- after all, this
had all
>started because she had wanted to have some fun playing catch with
Asuma.
Then everyone else had to butt in- which wasn't so bad, as
long as it had
>been a friendly game. But then, her dinner out with Asuma had
been
interrupted by this stupid challenge that the Riot Squad had
issued- they'd
>been forced to practice instead of going out. THEN this stupid
pitcher,
who was winding up to throw his next pitch, had hit a
friend of hers... She
>was more than just mad, she was FURIOUS.

>*crack* Asuma gaped as the ball went flying out of the park. "Eep,"
he
said, noting Noa's expression as she rounded the bases. This
was more than
>just a game for her- this was getting personal. "Good shot," he said
as
she walked by.
>
"Asuma," she said sternly as she walked by. "Remember not to
strike out...
>or I'll be really mad at you."

>'Oh, yeah... she's pissed,' he thought as he stepped up to the
plate. He'd
never been good at sports- he figured he could do
pretty well at shortstop,
>considering how often he and Noa had played catch while off duty
over at
SV2 Headquarters, but hitting was another matter. He

slumped back, waited
>for the pitch, closed his eyes, and swung as hard as he could.

>His ball went soaring as well, ending up with another home run. As Asuma
rounded the bases, he could tell that the pitcher still hadn't quite
>recovered from hitting Kanuka- something which the Riot Squad captain saw
as well after the back-to-back-to-back home runs, as he called time out to
>change pitchers.

>Noa, however, didn't care why the pitch went so far- she was just glad that
Asuma had listened to him about not striking out. When he got into the
>dugout, she grabbed him and gave him a kiss, not thinking about the danger
of discovery.

>
Once they realized what they were doing, however, they quickly broke apart
>and glanced around. Asuma noticed that only Gotoh could have seen them,
and he wasn't looking at them. Of course, the captain might have just been
>pretending to have not seen anything, but Asuma couldn't be certain.

>Asuma coughed, and whispered into Noa's ear, "If we win, I'll make sure we
can eat our dinner privately."

>
Noa just beamed at him, saying nothing. They were now leading seven to
>nothing- even IF Kanuka was out, their lead was large enough that they
could just coast through the rest of the game.

>
* * * * *

>
The new pitcher for the riot squad proved to be coolly efficient, striking
>Ueki Mashimo and Shinshi out without any difficulties and bringing the Riot
Squad up to the plate. As Ohta approached the mound, Asuma pulled him
>aside.

>"Remember, Ohta," Asuma noted, "This is SOFTBALL, not baseball. Throw
underhand, not overhand."

>
Ohta didn't say anything- he just nodded. After the three hour practice
>Shinshi put him through, he didn't want to risk throwing overhand. At
least, he would at first. Use that overhand fastball for a surprise move-
>that was the key.

>Ohta threw a pitch and, for the first time, a member of the riot squad made
contact with the ball, sneaking between first and second base and into the
>outfield, where Yuhki Watanabe picked it up and cut the runner off before
he could advance the hit past a single.

>
When Ohta got the ball back, he grimaced. That pitch didn't work as he had
>hoped. Gritting his teeth, he looked at the signal from Shinshi and
nodded. Once again, he threw an underhand pitch... and once again, with a
>crack of the bat the riot squad players were running.

>The ball bounced in the direction of Asuma, who dove and grabbed it before
it could get past him. "Noa!" he cried, tossing it straight to her from
>his back.

>Noa, in perfect co-ordination, caught his toss, tagged the bag with her
foot, and fired the ball over to Takeo at first.

>
In the dugout, one of the riot squad players whistled. "Nice double play,"
>he said. "Those three work well together."

>The riot squad captain nodded. "Next time someone's running into second
base, take that girl down."
>
The others looked at him in surprise. "What?"
>
"You heard me- take her out. Slide into base with your cleats-spike her."
>If you can't do that, run into her and knock her down. Get rid of her- if
you remove the linchpin of that group, the others will be
>weakened."

>"Captain, that's-" one of the officers started.

>"Are you considering disobeying my orders? If so, do you realize I could
charge you with insubordination?" Silence answered him. "We are NOT
>going to lose this game to these incompetent fools, no matter what we have
to do."
>
The man at the bat (who had not heard the orders given by his captain) ALSO
>made contact with the ball, sending it flying into the outfield, between
Ueki Mashimo and Yamane Seiroku. Both players sped towards the projectile,
>neither looking out for the other. In the middle of the field, they
collided into each other and tumbled to the ground. Mashimo, struggling to
>disentangle himself, reached out and caught the ball before collapsing back
into a heap.
>
Seiroku jumped up, a scowl on his face directed at Ueki. The two

>outfielders made their way back to the dugout in silence, but when they got
there, neither of them were particularly happy.
>
As Koichi Miyagi walked up to the plate, Seiroku started blowing some steam
>off against Mashimo.

>"What do you think you were doing?" he ranted. "Don't you look where
you're going?!"
>
"Hey, it was my ball!" Mashimo shot back. "You should have been looking
>out for ME!"

>"I'm the center fielder! It's ALWAYS my ball, unless you call it!"

>"It was in right field! It's not your ball if it's in right field!"

>"It was NOT in right field!" Seiroku screamed. "Are you BLIND?"

>By this point, everyone in the dugout was staring at the bickering pair, so
no-one noticed when Koichi struck out and Ohta went from the on-deck circle
>to the plate. Koichi approached at this point, smiling as usual, and
looked around. "Hey, gang, what's up?" he asked.
>
"Just shut up!" Ueki shouted, throwing a wild punch in the direction of
>Seiroku. The fist made impact against Seiroku's battered nose, splattering
it across his face.
>
Ueki paused, staring at Seiroku's ruined face, then at his bloody hand,
>then back at Seiroku's face, and gaped.

>"I. Can't. Believe. That. You. Broke. My. Nose. AGAIN!"
Seiroku
growled. "That's it! This time, I'm not going to just let

you get away
>with this without answer!" Charging in, Seiroku started pounding
on
Mashimo, sending punch after punch into the other man. In self
defense,
>Ueki started returning the attacks blow for blow.

>Even Gotoh was a little ruffled by the sudden outburst between the
two
officers. "Hey, break it up! That's an order!" he cried.

>
The fighters didn't listen... until, that is, Hiromi came
between them,
>picking each of them up by the back of the neck and pulling them
apart. As
the two of them were held in mid-air by the gentle
giant, Gotoh came over
>and inspected the two of them.

>"Hmm. Bruises, torn uniforms, looks like at least one dislocated
arm,
and... if I'm not mistaken," Gotoh said, poking each of them
in the ribs.
>Both Seiroku and Ueki shuddered. "Yep- rib injuries as well." He
paused,
contemplating what to say. "You do know that there are
penalties for
>intentionally rendering yourself incapable of working, don't
you?"

>"I beg your apologies, sir," Seiroku muttered.

>"Yeah, same here," Ueki said.

>Gotoh shrugged. "I accept, but you aren't going to have as easy a
time
apologizing to the people who it will really matter to- your
captains. But
>in the meantime, you will have to go to get those injuries checked
out."
Gotoh turned away to inspect his bench players as Ohta
returned after
>striking out. Pointing to two people at random, he said, "I don't
know
either of you, but you'll probably be best suited to playing
in the
>outfield." Tazaki Hiroaki and Toru Sasaki, the commander car
operators for
Unit 1, both accepted their new roles with a simple
nod. "Oh, yeah," Gotoh
>said as he turned his attention back to the game. "Hiromi, you can
let
them down now."
>
* * * * *
>
With Ohta out, Yuhki Watanabe went up to the plate, and he, too,
struck
>out. The two new players, together with the rest of the team, went
out to
the field and prepared to play defense.
>
Once again, the first pitch towards the riot squad player was
hit. It was
>popped up into center field, right where Tazaki Hiroaki was
standing. He
was so surprised that a ball was coming his way on
his first play that he
>didn't move to catch the ball, and it fell a couple of feet in front
of
him. Quickly gathering his wits, Tazaki grabbed the bouncing
ball and
>threw it as hard as he could to Noa, who tossed it to Asuma covering
her
spot on the second base bag. It didn't matter, though, because
the person
>who hit the ball didn't even try to move past first.

>A scowl grew on Ohta's face, but he was determined not to make
any
mistakes. Once more, he threw underhand. Once more, he watched
the ball
>bounce over his head. Asuma darted back, fielding the ball behind
Noa and
tossing it to her. She caught the ball, tagged the bag,

turned...

>
And was plowed over by the runner coming from first. In addition to being
>knocked over, she was stepped on by the riot squad player's cleated shoes,
sending several small spike wounds into her back.

>
"NOA!" Asuma cried, running over to her and picking her up, cradling her in
>his arms. "Noa, are you all right?"
>"My back!" she whimpered. "Aagh! It hurts... Asuma, it hurts."

>Asuma grimaced. Only now did he notice the cuts in her back, as blood
started dripping over his hands. "Damn," he cursed. Gotoh and the rest of
>the team ran up.
>"Noa, are you okay?" Gotoh asked. When she didn't answer, he turned to
Asuma. "Is she okay?"
>
Asuma shook his head. "She's bleeding... Captain, request permission to
>take her to be examined."
>Gotoh half-smirked and nodded. "Of course, Shinohara. Attend to her well.
I'll just have to find a replacement for you."

>
Asuma, carrying Noa in a classic damsel-in-distress pose, hurried away as
>Gotoh returned to the dugout to find a couple of replacements. "Ishikawa,
Kawai, go on out there."
>
Natsume Kawai and Joudo Ishikawa nodded. As they trotted out to the field,
>Natsume whispered to Joudo, "Um, what am I supposed to do? I've never
played this game before."
>
"Urk!" Joudo squawked. "Um, okay, first, you need to stand by that bag
>over there... when the ball comes your direction, you..."
>* * * * *
>Joudo finished his crash course in softball as the two of them walked up to
their positions, and the game was underway again. The end results of the
>play that injured Noa was an out, but there was still a man on first base
to deal with.
>
So, in order to get past the inning, the SV2 had to make two more outs...
>AND contend with Ohta, who by that point had blown his top.

>'All right,' he thought to himself. 'These little "underhand" pitches are
getting me nowhere- I'm going to throw a REAL fastball!'
>
And so he did. It was perfectly straight, perfectly on target- and
>perfectly illegal.
>"That's an illegal pitch!" the umpire shouted.
>Ohta ran up to him, and would have confronted him directly if Shinshi
hadn't stepped in his way.
>
"It IS a legal pitch!" Ohta barked. "A fastball's a legal pitch!"
>
"This is SOFTBALL! A fastball's only legal if you can throw it underhand!"
>
"What does it matter? We're police officers- we should always be expecting
>the unexpected!"

>"THIS IS A SOFTBALL GAME! WHETHER YOU'RE A POLICE OFFICER OR NOT DOESN'T
MATTER!" the umpire cried.

>
"Help," Shinshi, now crushed between the two of them, whimpered painfully.

>
* * * * *

>
Ohta managed NOT to be ejected, but in the process the batter was to first

>and Shinshi was so battered that he had to be carried off on a stretcher.
Gotoh sent in the biggest target possible- Hiromi. In fact, Hiromi was so

>big that the umpire couldn't see around him, so when (the now emotionally
contained- sort of) Ohta tossed in his next pitch a bit outside, the umpire

>couldn't exactly tell what to call it.

>"Uh... um... strike one?"

>The game continued, and Ohta actually managed to strike out the batter.
When the next one came up, however, a crack of the bat cleared the bases

>with a home run. The final batter of the inning popped out to Koichi
Miyagi, and the SV2 came back up to the plate.

>
Takeo Kumagami was the first batter, and she had words for the catcher,

>opening her mouth for the first time since the game started. "You know, I
wasn't taking this game very seriously," she noted. "Not until you started

>intentionally hurting our people. And then, of all things, you hurt Noa in
front of her boyfriend- which really ticks me off, because those two have

>something really rare. Something I wish I had. And that shouldn't be
hurt, no matter what. And yet, you did."

>
She slung her bat over her shoulder. The pitch came in, and Takeo smacked

>it out of the park. "I'm going to start trying to win, now," she noted as
she set down the bat before making her way around the bases.

>
Toru Sasaki, the grizzled old veteran who had taken over one of the

>outfield positions when Seiroku and Ueki Mashimo left the game, stood into
the plate next. He smacked the ball off into right field, but was unable

>to run fast enough to beat the throw to first base, and was called out.

>Following Toru was Noa and Asuma's replacements, Joudo Ishikawa and Natsume
Kawai. Joudo grounded out on his first pitch, and then Natsume came up to

>the plate.

>"Um... I've never played this game before," she said to the catcher. "What
am I supposed to do?"

>
The catcher smirked. This was too easy. "Don't worry, sugar," he said

>flirtatiously. "This is all you have to do- when you see the ball coming,
close your eyes and swing your bat against the plate."

>
Natsume frowned. "That doesn't sound like what the others were doing...."

>
"What, you don't trust me?" the catcher whimpered, trying to get that

>puppy-dog look on his face.

>"No, I don't mean that!" Natsume assured. "I believe you! Don't be
upset!"

>
"I won't. Now, are you ready to play?" he said. Natsume nodded, the curls
>of her hair bobbing in acknowledgment. 'Like taking candy from a baby,' he
thought as he put on his mask.
>
The ball came in, Natsume closed her eyes, and *bam*.

>
"Ow," the catcher said, as he removed the bat from the back of his head.

>
Natsume looked deeply apologetic. "I'm sorry- I couldn't see with my eyes

>closed, and so I missed the plate, and..."

>The catcher wasn't in any position to reply.

>* * * * *

>After the riot squad changed catchers (and Joudo snuck up to give Natsume a
more correct version of how to act when a hitter), the game resumed.

>Natsume actually got a bat on the ball- to hit a couple of fouls. Finally,
though, she struck out, and the game went on.

>
The SV2's luck ran out the next inning. Several balls skipped past Natsume

>Kawai or over the reach of Joudo Ishikawa. Several balls hit to the
outfield were fumbled by Tazaki Hiroaki or could not be reached by the

>slow-moving Toru Sasaki. Ohta was able to manage one strikeout, and
Kumagami was able to stop a ground ball and run to the bag to get another

>out on her own, but six runs scored before the last out could be made- and
that last out a difficult one, as well.

>
Finally, though, Joudo was able to field a ground ball, and toss it to

>first- off balance, but he made it just in time for the out to be called.

>"Good play, Joudo!" his teammates called, but their voices were a little
dispirited. They were now losing, eight to nine.

>
The opposing captain, however, was grimly satisfied. "Okay, men- we're now

>in the lead. Make sure we stay that way- I don't care WHAT you have to do,
got it?" His team knew better than to question him, that time.

>
Tazaki Hiroaki was the first one up. He went down rather quickly, swinging

>wildly and popping up a foul ball that the catcher caught. Hiromi was
next, looking a little too large for the bat he was carrying.

>
The first pitch came in right down the middle, hitting the catcher's mitt

>dead on. "Ball one!" The umpire cried.

>The pitcher didn't believe it. "Ball? How can you call that a ball- it
was a perfect pitch!"

>
"It was low- it needs to get at least as high as the hitters knees!"

>
"Are you kidding? His knees are taller than my catcher!"

>
"Sorry, but I can't help that- the rules say-"

>
"Fine!" the pitcher growled. With that, he wound up and threw his next

>pitch... which went soaring over the catcher and clonked the umpire,
knocking him over.

>
"That was intentional!" the umpire growled, standing up with a hand on the

>lump that was forming on his head. "You're out of the game!"

>The pitcher's eyes widened. "WHAT? You're throwing me out?! For what?"

>"For hitting me on the head with a softball- what do you think?"

>The pitcher couldn't reply to that.

>* * * * *

>The new pitcher decided it wasn't worth trying to get Hiromi out after the
debacle with the last pitcher, and so just walked him intentionally.

>Koichi Miyagi, who had yet to lose his smile since the game began, came up
next. The new pitcher hadn't yet gotten control of his pitches, however,

>and walked him. Then Ohta came to the plate, but he was a bit too
enthusiastic. Believing he had to give the team the lead himself, he swung

>for a home run at every pitch, even those that would not have been strikes,
and so was quickly struck out.

>
Yuhki Watanabe was up next, and for once he actually wasn't nervous.

>Swinging heartily, he hit a nice ball into the outfield. He rounded first
and started to second, but couldn't go on because there were people in

>front of him. Koichi Miyagi, rounding second, was tripped up by the
shortstop. He stumbled up, and limped back to second Hiromi made it home

>for the tying run. Gotoh walked out to first base to talk to Koichi.

>"How's your leg?"

>"Hurt, sir... I don't think I'll be able to run around the bases."

>Gotoh nodded, and singled to the dugout. Yoshi Tobe, the transport driver
for unit three with a pleasant disposition and a scar over his left eye,

>ran out and took Koichi's place while Gotoh helped him off the field.

>Kumagami came up next. The catcher, remembering her threat from the
previous time she'd come up to bat, intentionally walked her. The next

>person due up was Toru Sasaki, the oldest and slowest member of the team.
Gotoh, sighing, grabbed a bat and a helmet. "Sasaki, sit down. I'm going

>up to hit, myself."

>"Sir?"

>Gotoh smirked. "I'm a player-coach this game. We didn't have enough
people on the bench for my comfort, considering he had fifty to choose

>from, so I made myself eligible to play. Since I was the only person left
on the bench, I figured I'd go up to bat."

>
Seated on the bench, the very non-descript Kenji Iguchi wondered why Gotoh

>had completely forgotten about him. Then he remembered he wasn't ever
remembered by anyone, including the author of this fanfic when he was

>plotting all of this, and decided to remain quiet and sit right where he
was.

>
Gotoh stood at the bat, slung the bat over his shoulder, crouched down, and

>looked into the pitchers eyes. The pitcher glanced in to see the

catcher's
sign, and caught the look Gotoh was giving him. He froze, hesitating.

>There was a power in those eyes- something he couldn't quite explain. It
was something that caused the hair to stand up on the back of his head, and

>made him fear throwing that pitch... he wasn't quite sure what to do.

>"Pitch the ball," Gotoh said, calmly and evenly.

>The pitcher could hardly refuse a request like that, and reached back to
pitch the ball.

>
With the bases loaded, two outs, and a tie game, the ball soared in. Gotoh

>eyed its trajectory, pulled back with the bat...

>And dropped it when his cell phone rang, letting the ball pass by for
strike one.

>
Turning to the surprised umpire, Gotoh pulled out his cell phone. "Um,

>time out- I need to answer this." Flipping open the phone, he said, "Gotoh
here... Ah, Shinobu! Why didn't you come to the game? Oh... ah... uh

>huh... well, okay, we'll be there in an hour." Closing his phone, he
sighed. "I'm afraid we'll have to end this little match- duty calls."

>
The referees and all the players from BOTH sides collapsed, not believing

>that the whole game was for nothing. The riot squad's captain, however,
was furious. Charging up to Gotoh, he growled, "So, you forfeit?"

>
Gotoh shook his head. "Why should I forfeit? This is no different from

>what would happen if it had rained. It's beyond the control of either of
us. Furthermore, the score is tied right now, so neither of us would win."

>
"Then when do you want to schedule a rematch?" the captain growled.

>
Gotoh's eyes hardened. "I won't."

>
"What?"

>
Finally, Gotoh exploded. "You idiot! This was just a stupid game, and yet

>you crippled half of a police unit to win it! I'm not going to risk my
people's necks just because you want to prove yourself, damn it! Now,

>excuse us, we have a job to do."

>The members of the SV2 followed Gotoh out, looking at him with shock at his
furious explosion. The members of the riot squad, on the other hand,

>looked at their captain with something very different- contempt.

>Next Episode: With the second and third unit largely decimated by the
softball game and Gotoh actually taking the day off for a change, the SV2

>is temporarily reorganized back into two units, one under Shinobu and the
other under Gomioka. Shinobu's shift is rather lonely without either Gotoh

>or Gomioka around... what does she do when no-one else is there?

>-----

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anime fanfics available at
> <http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
>

11. Episode 11: Daily Relief

>Patlabor: Personal Files
An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum

>Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>Episode 11: Daily Relief
January 28, 2000

>(Ya know, I'm beginning to regret having put dates in this fic... oh, well.
 This fanfic is set in a universe where the Y2K problem really existed,

>where labors run rampant, and where you can have three new years
celebrations in 1999... well, you get the idea)

>
Shinobu and Gomioka both stood up as Gotoh returned to the hospital's

>waiting room.

>"How are they?" Shinobu asked.

>Gotoh sighed. "Mashimo and Seiroku will both be out of action for three to
five days, at least- and that's only if they take a lot of bed rest. Noa

>is worse off- she had to have surgery for a punctured colon. She'll be out
for more than a month recuperating, and then light duty only when she gets

>back. Koichi Miyagi can only have very light duties for the next few days,
and nothing that'll put any stress on his leg. Shinshi will be fine by

>tomorrow, but the doctors said he had a concussion earlier in the week that
should have treated than, and have advised bed rest. That means we have

>six people out of major action for the next week or so."

>Shinobu raised an eyebrow. "Six?"

>Gotoh nodded. "For some reason, Shinohara suddenly asked to take a lot of
leave he had been saving up. Considering we would be down two labor crews

>regardless of his being on the station or not, I figured it wouldn't do any
harm to grant his request."

>
"I knew that stupid bet of yours was a terrible idea," Gomioka grumbled.

>"Now look at us- we're down a whole labor team! And for what? For some
silly grudge match between you and a captain from the riot squad?

>Disgraceful."

>Gotoh shrugged off the near insult. "At any rate, we're going to need to
reorganize the SV2 until things get more closer to normal."

>
"Most of the injuries were to your two units," Shinobu noted, "But I do

>need a transport driver for my second team since Mashimo was injured."

>Gotoh nodded. "Since both Izumi and Shinohara are unavailable, I'll lend
you Hiromi. He's our best driver, and his size makes him rather

>intimidating."

>Shinobu nodded happily. "Thanks," she said.

>"By the way, do you happen to know what happened between Seiroku and
>Mashimo to set them off on one another like that? Beyond the events in the
>game, I mean."

>Shinobu frowned. "I'm not entirely sure. I believe it has something to do
>with one of them ratting out the other for having something they weren't
>supposed to in their cabin- something alchoholic, probably, though I don't
>know for sure. Whichever one it was who got turned it found out about it,
>and the confrontation that followed resulted in a pretty nasty fight. That
>was how Seiroku's nose got broken the first time. Then, there was a
>training incident where Ueki accidentally hit the same nose with a pugil
>stick, and then the martial arts training where Ueki threw Seiroku onto the
>ground face first, breaking his nose, and then... well, you get the
>picture."
>"Indeed," Gotoh said. "Well, at any rate, Gomioka and I still need to
>reorganize our teams. I suggest we use Kumagami to take Seiroku's place in
>Ohta's unit, and Kenji to take the command car for Joudo's labor. That
>means that we're back down to having two units, but we have two captains
>for them. Say, Captain Gomioka, how would you like to take today's shift
>at captain, and we'll alternate days until we can return to three units
>again?"
>Gomioka was caught a little off guard. Gotoh and Shinobu were both acting
>rather unconcerned with the situation, considering... of course, there had
>been several times where the second unit- or part of it- had been knocked
>out of action for several days in the past- the first Griffin incident
>which lead to Asuma and Takeo both being hospitalized for the entire
>action, the time food poisoning took down not just most of the labor
>operators in the second unit, but the entire mechanics squad as well, and
>various incidents where one or both labors were rendered inoperable for a
>period of time.
>It was when Gomioka had come to the realization that temporary

>reorganizations were a commonplace thing in captains lives that Gotoh
>posed his question, and so Gomioka was unprepared for it.

>"Yes, sir," he replied automatically, not thinking.
>Gotoh nodded. "Good. If you and Captain Nagumo will excuse me, I want to
>go home for the day. I'll take over for you tomorrow."

>Shinobu was shocked. He usually spent every minute either on duty or
>trying to hang around her- even if it meant staying on base when on duty.
>There were times Shinobu wondered if Gotoh even had a home of his own,
>or if he lived on base- for him to be leaving was downright un-natural to her.
>"Gotoh? What are you going to be doing? If you don't mind my asking, that
>is...."

>Gotoh grabbed his coat from the chair and started out the door. "My niece
>is in town for the week... I thought it might be nice to visit her while
>she's here, considering she IS staying at my place."
>"Have fun," she said as the door shut behind him. She stared at it for
>several moments, wondering why she hadn't heard about his niece being in
>town before. Several long moments.
>"Shinobu, are you listening?" Gomioka asked.
>That started her out of her reverie. "I'm sorry, what did you ask?"
>"Do you want to take the first shift or the second today?"

>"Oh... first. Go and get some sleep, but do so in the dorm rooms. With
>just two units, you're on standby today."
>"Yes, Ma'am!" Gomioka cried, saluting. Shinobu didn't even notice as her
>attention was once more on the door that Captain Gotoh had gone out of.
>'What is he up to?' she wondered. His behavior was so uncharacteristic of
>him he MUST be doing something- after all, he didn't get the name of 'Razor
>Blade' Gotoh for nothing- but what was it? And why didn't he want to ask
>her about it?
>* * * * *
>"Uncle Gotoh!" the teenage girl cried as her uncle came through the door.
>"I didn't think you'd be able to visit!"
>Gotoh smiled. "Well, I still might want to talk to Shinobu again later
>today, but I figured I shouldn't miss a chance to talk to you while you
>were in town. So, how has life been since that little training prank we
>pulled together on my unit?"
>"I got accepted to all my colleges, Uncle Gotoh! I could even go to the
>police academy, if I wanted!"
>Gotoh smiled. "That's great! Let's celebrate. Where do you want to go
>out to eat?"
>* * * * *
>Noa blinked open her eyes to see Asuma sitting at her bedside.

>"Ack! What are you doing here?!" she screeched, trying weakly to pull the
>blankets up to cover her nightclothes... only to discover she wasn't
>wearing her usual pajamas, but a hospital gown. Which was probably worse,
>but once she realized she was in the hospital she calmed down and
>remembered he was probably just worrying about her.

>Asuma looked a little annoyed at being yelled at. "Well, I figured you
>might want someone here when you woke up to tell you what was going on. I
>took some leave time to keep you company for the next few days as well...
>but it's not too late for me to cancel it if you don't want me around."
>Noa glared at him. "Of course I want you around- I want company, and I
>want that company to be my boyfriend. So, how long until I can use
>Alphonse again?"

> Asuma squirmed uncomfortably. Noa calling him her 'boyfriend' so
>blatently, while not unpleasant, made him feel rather uneasy-
as if he
>wasn't entirely sure what he was getting into, and wasn't entirely
sure if
>he'd like it or not. Still, he wasn't going to stop her
from doing so...
>well, not unless there was a chance one of their co-workers might
overhear.
>"Sorry, Noa... you had to get surgery to repair a punctured colon.
The
>>wounds themselves weren't really that severe, but since you
had to go under
>anesthesia and get stitches you are out of action for a while. No
police
>work- which means no Alphonse- for a month. Then, only
light duty- which
>STILL means no Alphonse- until you receive medical clearance... and
they
>won't give you that until at least two weeks after you get
back on duty-
>that's a policy I was told about when my ribs got busted."

>"Six weeks without Alphonse?" Noa cried weakly, distressed.

>Asuma sighed- he hadn't wanted to tell her that. "I'll see if I
can
>arrange for you to visit him when you're back on your feet,
but that won't
>be for a while yet." He hesitated. "I can try to take his place
while you
>can't see him, though- I'll still be here."
>Noa smiled tiredly- she was still feeling the effects of the
drugs they had
>used to put her under. "That's sweet, Asuma... but no. Alphonse
fills a
>part of my heart you don't... but then again, you fill a
part of my heart
>he can't."

>Asuma almost asked her what she meant by that, but then he noticed
she'd
>fallen asleep as she said it.
>* * * * *

>Shinobu sighed, relaxing into her chair. All of her paperwork
for the next
>five weeks had been completed, there had been no calls, and there
wasn't
>anyone around flirting with- er, bugging her. She'd tried
to puzzle out
>what Gotoh was doing, but she didn't have enough evidence to even
start
>investigating... though she was fairly certain visiting his
niece had nothing
>to do with it. She had called his house the moment she could and
found
>that neither he NOR his niece were there.
>The other person she might talk to, Gomioka, was asleep... and
she could
>tell he needed it. Shinobu wasn't too sure about him, any more.
She'd
>been certain that he would be a good captain when she
recommended his
>promotion, but it appeared at times the job was getting too
stressful for
>him. There was certainly no reason for him to jump
on Gotoh about the
>softball game- it was supposed to be just a friendly contest, not
the near
>bloodfest it became. There was certainly no way of
knowing that the riot
>squad captain was actually willing to injure fellow police officers
to win
>some stupid game.
>That wasn't the only thing that made her wonder- she had
dismissed the

>fears Gomioka had expressed about his leadership ability the other day as
rookie mistakes, but in truth Gomioka was having a very poor success rate

>with his men. Perhaps she should ask Gotoh to take over the temporary
combined unit for the rest of the week, and give Gomioka some extra time

>off to relieve some of his stress. She knew it didn't help that his
marriage was in trouble- a week off might be enough time for him to work

>that out, at least. Then again, knowing what a workaholic Gomioka was,
he'd never go for it.

>
Shinobu distracted herself from her thoughts with a loud yawn. 'Hmm, I'm

>getting awfully tired,' she thought to herself, stretching.

'Usually,
though, there's a lot more to do during the day... I wish Gotoh was here-

>or at least that he would call like he usually does when he isn't in the
office. Then at least I'd have the challenge of fending off his advances.'

>
Sighing, she stood up and walked over to her personal mailbox, checking to

>see if anything new had come in for her since the previous night. Finding
a small stack of letters, she pulled it out and headed back over to her

>desk.

>"Hmm," she said to herself, "Let's see what we've got.... Junk, junk,
junk, bill, postcard, bill.... Wait, postcard?" Checking the address on

>the back, she blinked. "Tsuge Yukihiro? Why, I haven't heard from him
since he left on that mission for the U.N. several months ago! I wonder

>what he has to say?"

>Tsuge Yukihiro had been an instructor of hers at the academy... and a
little bit more in her personal life. Things had gotten rather...

>intimate... between them for a while. After she'd gotten command of her
own unit, however, their rendezvous became fewer and fewer. At some point-

>shortly after Gotoh had been transferred into the SV2 to become her XO- she
had realized that they'd drifted apart completely. They still communicated

>by mail frequently, but they hadn't seen each other in more than a year.

>At times, Shinobu wondered if the timing of that realization had been a
coincidence... but it wasn't that she was no longer in love with Tsuge.

>She was. It was that he wasn't around any more.

>Of course, that might have been it. Tsuge was unavailable, and Gotoh was.
While she loved Tsuge, she couldn't deny being at least a LITTLE attracted

>to her fellow captain. It would never work out between her and Gotoh,
though- he was too much of a slob, and Tsuge was still number one in her

>heart. Well, maybe not NEVER work out, but it would take a while.

>Smiling fondly to herself, Shinobu started reading the letter on the back
of the card.

>
"Shinobu, my Love," it began.

>"I am not entirely certain what I can and what I can't tell you. Suffice
to say, however, that as much as I care about you, this

will be the last
>time I will ever talk to you or send you any sort of letter. I am
very
sorry. However, I will leave you with one thought of comfort-
here is a
>poem I have composed, which should explain things better than I
could say
them...."
>
Shinobu stopped reading right there. "What?" she gasped. "Why?"
She
>tried to read on, but the tears that had suddenly appeared in her
eyes made
that impossible.
>
It was probably inevitable that one of them would have said it,
but she was
>still unprepared for it. Obviously, he had also realized that they
were
over, and was breaking all ties. A real break up, instead of
the simple
>seperation they had been living under.

>'Why?' Shinobu thought to herself. 'I loved him, and now he isn't
even
going to talk to me again....'
>
* * * * *
>
Gotoh smiled at his niece. "Well, were do you want to go next?"

>
His niece seemed to consider the question for a bit. "Hmm... I
think I'd
>like to go see where you work... I mean, I may go to the police
academy,
and if I do I might wind up involved with labors.
Shouldn't I see what it
>is I'd be getting myself into?"

>Gotoh seemed a little surprised. "Of course... in fact, while we're
on our
way there, why don't we stop by police headquarters and I
can introduce you
>to a few friends of mine. They should give you a better example of
what
life in the police is like..."
>
* * * * *
>
A few hours later, Gotoh and his niece were walking through the
halls of
>the SV2 Barracks.

>"...met Shinobu before, but that was when we were on the campus,"
Gotoh was
saying. "Now you'll meet her in her professional
environment, just like
>you met Inspector Matsui in his."

>His niece laughed. "Matsui was funny... how can someone so fat be a
good
field officer?"
>
"You'd be surprised," Gotoh replied, opening the door to his
office and
>looking in.

>Shinobu was slumped down into his chair, a now empty bottle of
whiskey
stolen from his file cabinet clutched protectively in her
hands, her
>uniform jacket and vest removed, her shirt top loosened, and tears
dripping
down her face.
>
Gotoh closed the door before his niece could see. "On second
thought,
>Shinobu is rather busy and doesn't look like she could talk to you
right
now. Why don't you go talk to Sakaki of the maintenance
squad, four doors
>down on your right. I'll go see if I can help her out...."

>His niece blinked. She knew her uncle well enough to know something
was
behind that door that he DIDN'T want her knowing about. "Um,
okay, Uncle

>Gotoh," she agreed, running off down the hall. When she disappeared into
Chief Sakaki's office, Gotoh reopened the door and went in.

>
"Ah, Gotoh!" Shinobu slurred. "I thought that was you just a moment ago...
>or was it a while ago? Oh, whatever... glad you're here."

>Gotoh was concerned to say the least. As quickly as he dared, he moved to
her side. "Shinobu, what's wrong? Why did you, er..."

>
"Why am I as drunk as a skunk?" Shinobu finished for him.
>'Cause I let
>him slip through my fingers."

>Gotoh blinked. "'Him?' 'Him' who?"

>Shinobu shook her head drunkenly. "It doesn't matter anymore- he doesn't
want to ever talk to me again. I mean, I knew it was over, but I always
>thought it would never REALLY be over, you know?"

>"I... don't understand," Gotoh said.

>Shinobu reached up and patted him on the cheek. "Don't worry,
'Razorblade.' I won't let it get out that you don't know everything."
>
"Er, thank you," Gotoh said, trying to keep himself from peaking down her
>unbuttoned shirt. "Um... how'd you know I keep my booze in that cabinet?"

>Shinobu laughed. "Are you kidding? After working with you as long as I
have, I'd be a TERRIBLE cop if I didn't know a few of your secrets. Just
>like I know you bet on horse races and give your unit free beer despite
regulations against it...."
>
"Er, well, that isn't really that much of a secret," Gotoh noted.
>
"And you know what?" Shinobu continued, apparently not hearing. "I don't
>care about it, I don't care if you drink when you shouldn't, I don't care
if you gamble, I don't care if you're a slob...." Reaching up, she grabbed
>him by his lapels and pulled him down to look at him face to face. "All I
care about is that I can talk to you when I want to, okay? That's it."
>With that, she pulled him even closer and kissed him fiercely. Gotoh was
so shocked that he didn't know what to do.
>
It was then that Chief Sakaki walked in. "Gotoh, why did you tell that
>niece of yours to talk to... er, excuse me. I think I'll give her a guided
tour of the facilities for a while, okay?" Quickly, the door shut behind
>him.

>His quick exit didn't matter, though. The mood was broken, and Gotoh had
enough time to recover from the kiss and step back for a moment, to think
>about how he should deal with all of this.

>"Shinobu, stop... this isn't the way I want this to happen," he said. "Not
when you're drunk- not when you aren't in control of yourself. Not on the
>rebound."

>"I lost him because I didn't hold onto him tightly enough... you aren't
him, but you're all I've got right now, and I'm gonna hold tight onto you

>enough to not lose you ever."

>She was, in fact, holding on to him rather tightly... his shoulders, where
she was clenched onto with a vice-like grip, were starting to hurt rather
>badly. Not that Gotoh cared at the moment.

>"Shinobu, you aren't going to lose me. Go ahead and hold on, if you like,
but don't do it like this- you're drunk, and not in control of yourself,
>and depressed." Gotoh paused. "Well, you're not in control of yourself
and depressed. I might not have any objection if you were just drunk...."
>
Shinobu laughed, sliding out of the chair to hang over him.
"That's
>probably why I like you so much- you can always keep your sense of humor
going no matter how bad the situation is. Well, that and I know you aren't
>going anywhere... not like SOME people I've loved...."

>Gotoh sighed. "Shinobu, please... I'm having a hard enough time resisting
you, do you have to hang over me like this?"

>
Shinobu sniffed, not quite able to cling onto him like she'd planned and
>falling a little. "I'm a little upset you're able to resist me at all! I
thought you liked me?"
>
"I more than like you, Shinobu," Gotoh said, catching her before she
>slumped to the ground. "That's why I'm resisting you."

>Shinobu didn't say anything in reply- she had passed out after standing up
too quickly.
>
Looking at her silently for a moment, Gotoh picked her up and carried her
>into his personal office, where he had a cot set up. He didn't want to
carry her through the hallways and let her crews see her passed out, drunk.
> Setting her on the bed carefully, he covered her with a blanket, and
stared at her for a moment.
>
"Hmm," he said to himself. "Looks like I'm gonna have part of a duty shift
>today, after all."

>* * * * *

>Gomioka stepped into the office when his shift arrived, feeling more
relaxed than he had been in a while. He had no Gotoh to deal with, which
>meant he'd be having a MUCH better day than normal.

>"I'm ready to take over, Captain Nagumo," he said, not looking at the duty
desk.
>
"Go ahead- I'm just finishing up some personal paperwork," Gotoh replied,
>looking curiously at a postcard. "Shinobu's asleep on the cot in my
personal study- she was exhausted when I showed up to visit with my niece,
>and I suggested I take over for her until your shift came up."

>"Hi!" the aforementioned niece said, waving. "So you're the new captain.
I'm thinking of joining the police academy, and may even decide to transfer
>here when I graduate. Who knows- you might become my commanding officer
one day."
>
'Great,' Gomioka thought to himself. 'Now his FAMILY intends to

haunt me
>for the rest of my career.'
>"Well, we're going home," Gotoh said, picking up his coat and setting the
>postcard on Shinobu's desk. "I'll be here to relieve you for standby duty
>tomorrow."
>"Carry on," Gomioka said.
>Gotoh and his niece went out the door, leaving behind a mess on Gotoh's
>desk.
>"Bah... does he EVER clean up after himself?" He walked over to clean up
>the mess, and noticed a bit of orange cloth. Curious, he picked that up
>first.
>"Shinobu's vest? What's that doing at Gotoh's desk?"
>For some reason, Gomioka started feeling even MORE jealous than he had been
>before.
>January 29, 2000
>Gotoh walked into the office. "Here to relieve you for standby duty, Mr.
>Gomioka. Carry on."
>Gomioka, the disciplinarian that he was, saluted. "Captain Nagumo has yet
>to be awakened. I should take care of that before I go."

>Gotoh shrugged. "Nah- don't bother. I'll do that."
>Gomioka grimaced. Letting Gotoh have that opportunity was NOT a good thing
>in his book- especially if things he really hoped hadn't happened the
>previous day HAD actually happened, but he didn't have much say in the
>matter. "Very well... I'll relieve you tomorrow."
>Gotoh nodded. "I'll probably be on base even when I'm off duty. I've got
>a lot of paperwork to catch up on."
>Gomioka stormed out the door, not even bothering to acknowledge Gotoh's
>announcement.
>"Huh... I wonder what's wrong with him." Gotoh set his jacket on the chair
>behind his desk and then stepped on into his personal office. Shinobu was
>sleeping in his cot, her clothes ruffled badly, drool coming out of one
>side of her mouth. Gotoh pulled out some equipment he had on hand and
>perked up some coffee before going over to wake him up.

>"Shinobu? Shinobu, wake up. Shinobu...."
>"Ugh!" Shinobu grimaced, sitting up slowly. "What hit me?"

>"Some cheap American rotgut whiskey. Nasty stuff to be drinking if you're
>not used to it."
>Shinobu winced, trying to open her eyes. "I got drunk?"
>Gotoh shoved a cup of black coffee into her hand. "Yep. Pretty badly,
>too."
>Shinobu frowned. "How did that happen?"
>"Something about a letter on a postcard, I believe. Um, you wouldn't
>happen to remember anything you did last night, do you?"

>Shinobu finally managed to open one bloodshot eye, glaring up at him.
>"Why? I didn't embarrass myself, did I?"
>Gotoh coughed. "Well, actually..."

>
"What did I do?"
 >
"You kissed me."
 >
That got the other eye open. "You didn't take advantage of my
 being drunk,
 >did you?" she growled angrilly.

 >Gotoh shook his head. "Like I said last night, you were drunk, out
 of
control, and depressed. I might take advantage of you when you
 were drunk,
 >but not unless you were both in control and as happy as you could
 be."

 >Suddenly, that phrase triggered a partial memory of the previous
 night.
"Er... it never happened, got it? And it won't ever happen
 again,
 >understand?"

 >Gotoh nodded. "I know better than to argue with a woman with a
 hangover."

 >Shinobu nodded, wincing her eyes closed again as the pain from her
 head
(and her stomach) overwhelmed her. "But promise me you won't
 stop trying,
 >okay? Things get pretty boring when you aren't around here, bugging
 me."

 >Gotoh blinked at her in surprise. Maybe not all of last night was
 due to
the whiskey. "Like I said, I know better than to argue with
 a woman with a
 >hangover."

 >-----
Next Episode: Unit 3's new labors
 finally arrive! There may be one last
 >mission for the old ones, however.... And now that Kanuka is part of
 the
team, will she or Seiroku be the unofficial 'third pilot'?

 >-----

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 anime fanfics available at
 > <http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
 >

12. Episode 12: Last Battle of the Ancient W...

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert
 legal junk here...

>
Episode 12: Last Battle of the Ancient Warriors

>February 15, 2000

>Gomioka REALLY needed this meeting- he had to get his mind off of
 the
previous day. Valentine's day. Perhaps the most humiliating
 day of his

>life.

>As was custom in Japan, most of the women had bought chocolates for
 all the
men in their lives- their lovers, their co-workers, and
 their bosses.

>Natsume Kawai from the second unit had hand-delivered a small box
 of
chocolate to everyone in the mechanics division, including
 Chief Sakaki,

>before giving out more chocolates to Captain Gotoh and all the male
 members
of the 2nd Unit. Takeo Kumagami followed suit, delivering
 small chocolates

>to Hiromi, Asuma, and Joudo before delivering a slightly larger

chocolate
to her captain.

>
Noa had shown up to deliver chocolates as well. Asuma had been with her at

>the hospital (officially taking 'personal leave,' and trying to convince
people that he WASN'T hanging by Izumi's side night and day), but that day

>he'd been given permission to take her onto the base to visit friends,
'provided she not engage in any work' and that she be confined to a

>wheelchair. Asuma saved a much needed day of leave by officially being on
call, but his duties that day consisted of pushing Noa around in a

>wheelchair. That was how he got the chocolates from Takeo and Natsume- the
matching chocolate stains on their lips when Noa arrived told everyone who

>wasn't completely oblivious to what the two were doing that they'd decided
to share the chocolate Noa had given him earlier.

>
Shinobu delivered her own chocolates to everyone in her unit- there were no

>other females in first unit, for some reason. She also gave one to Gotoh,
as well- though not to him. Her official excuse for having one to give to

>Gotoh was that she'd accidentally bought one too many, but Gomioka had to
wonder. He had his suspicions about what had happened that night about two

>weeks previous, and the hesitant- almost guilty- way the two had been
treating each other since that night seemed to confirm it, but Gomioka

>hoped he was wrong. In fact, he fervently wished he was wrong. He
couldn't think of how to find out, however.

>
Even Kanuka, despite being an American by birth, followed the Japanese

>variant of the Valentine tradition... sort of. Chocolates from her went
around to the various people she'd worked closely with- Captain Gotoh got a

>chocolate from her, Shige and Sakaki got chocolates, Hiromi, Ohta, Asuma,
Shinshi- basically, all of the guys in the second unit or associated with

>it prior to the re-organization of the SV2 Division 2.

>Her final Valentine chocolate- obviously a piece of 'giri' chocolate- was
delivered to Gomioka himself. That would have been fine, except the timing

>of it was way off.

>Just as Kanuka handed Gomioka the box of chocolate, Gomioka's wife walked
in, carrying her own box. Taking one look at the scene, his wife turned

>and walked back out. Gomioka ran out to follow her, and found the gift she
had gotten for him lying in the trash can, while she, herself, was long

>gone.

>It had taken many long hours of talking with her over the phone to calm her
down and convince her that no, he was not having an affair with Kanuka, and

>that the chocolates she was giving him were merely a professional courtesy,
and had no romantic connotations whatsoever.

>
In the end, Gomioka wound up with no chocolates, because in order to

>satisfy his wife he had to return the gift back to Kanuka. Gomioka was the
only male in the entire SV2 Second Section who had no

chocolates by the end

>of the day, as Kanuka, upon getting the chocolates back from him, divided
the contents of the box with two of his other men- Yoshi Tobe and Yamane

>Seiroku. It might be noted that Kenji Iguchi was a male who also failed to
receive any chocolates, but that was because no-one remembered him- Kanuka

>forgot to save a portion for him, and his teammates forgot to remind her.
However, no-one noticed his disappointment and so Gomioka didn't even think

>about the fact that Kenji also didn't get anything.

>Gomioka knew he was probably being paranoid, but he could swear that every
time he turned his back on someone in the SV2, they were pointing at him

>and laughing about his misfortune. It didn't help that his most bitter
rival in the SV2, Captain Gotoh, recieved more Valentine chocolate than

>anyone.

>Regardless of the whole Valentine's day fiasco, there was a piece of news
that Gomioka hoped would help him rise from the doldrums.

Finally, he was

>getting the equipment he would need to turn his unit into an EFFECTIVE
force- his three new labors were coming. Soon, very soon, he would have

>top-of-the-line labors to man his shift with.

>They weren't supposed to arrive until the twentieth, but Gomioka had a
surprise for his men (and women). But now, with the date of delivery

>confirmed, there were certain things he would be allowed to do to get them
ready.

>
"Listen up, people," he said, addressing the six members of the third unit.

> "Finally, we're all back together again, after that disaster of a softball
tournament crippled half of you. Unit 2, however, is not- they are still

>down a pilot due to injury and a command car operator due to, ahem,
personal reasons. Because of this, Unit 2 has...

graciously... loaned us

>one of their Ingrams so that those of you who aren't fully familiar with it
can learn the differences between an Ingram and a Type 97, and for those of

>you who ARE familiar with it to get a refresher course in its workings."
Gomioka had to struggle to say 'graciously' without showing his distaste

>for pandering to Gotoh too publically, but he managed. Continuing, he
announced, "Our own labors are on the way, and we'll be recieving them in

>five days. I expect all of you to be the best Ingram operators in the
country by the time they arrive. Understand?"

>
"Yes, sir!" the six labor operators chorused.

>
"Good- everyone, get your equipment. Drills start in two minutes!

>
* * * * *

>
February 20, 2000

>
The drills had been tough and intense. For four days straight, Gomioka

>would make sure everyone had a turn at the controls, getting the Ingram to
do complex tasks with minimal motion. Gomioka started enjoying command for

>the first time- he was in his element now, and no-one was better

than he
was at running labor drills.

>
Finally, the day the new labors were to join them had arrived.

Gomioka

>could drive away his concerns over Gotoh and Shinobu by putting himself
into his work. Furthermore, now that he had useful patlabors on the way,

>much of the stress would go out of his job. Perhaps, for once, his
position as Captain would be what he'd been dreaming it would be.

>
For some reason, though, his labors were late.

>
He walked into the office, where both Shinobu and Gotoh were working.

>Shinobu was officially on her duty shift and Gotoh was officially on his
standby shift, but Gotoh for some reason chose to spend all of his time in

>the office with Shinobu even when he didn't have to.

>Gomioka stiffened for a moment upon seeing his inter-office rival standing
over Shinobu's desk, pointing something out on a piece of paper. Quickly

>recovering his composure, he walked over to his own desk and sat down.
Turning to the other captains, he asked, "My labors should have been here

>three hours ago... who am I supposed to call for inquiries about such
things?"

>
Shinobu looked over at him. "Probably they're just stuck in traffic. You

>might want to call the quartermaster's corps to find out for certain,
however- they're in charge of labor procurement."

>
Gomioka nodded and looked through the SV2 Official Phone List to find the

>number of the quartermaster's corps. Dialing them up, he waited for
someone to pick up the phone.

>
After twelve rings, he hung up the phone and tried again, just to make

>certain that he had dialed the right number. When again it didn't answer
after twelve rings, he turned to Gotoh and Shinobu, still discussion

>paperwork. "Hey, is this the current number for the quartermaster corps?"
he asked.

>
Gotoh, already standing, walked over to check what he was pointing to.

>"Yeah- that's it, all right."

>Gomioka frowned. "Well, they aren't picking up on the other end- not even
voice mail is coming up."

>
"That's strange," Shinobu said. "There's always someone on duty over

>there."

>Gotoh walked over to his desk and picked up his own phone, dialing several
other numbers. A few rings after each call, he hung up.

"Hmm... I just

>tried to make contact with various people I know who works in the same
building- neither they nor their voice mail is picking up, either.

>Something very strange is going on." Gotoh paused to consider things for a
moment.

>
"Should we investigate it?" Shinobu asked, thinking aloud.

>
"You and I can't," Gotoh noted. "We're on duty, and it would be a bad idea

>to go out on just a hunch when there's a chance we could get called into
action at any moment."
>
Gomioka caught the implication in Gotoh's voice, and nodded. As much as he
>disliked the man, he had a point. "My unit IS officially off duty... think

anyone would mind if I took the Ancient Warriors out for one last spin?"
>
"Ancient Warriors?" Shinobu asked.
>
Gomioka looked abashed. "It's a nickname the mechanics squad gave them,"
>he explained. "I sort of picked it up."

>"Fitting," she said. Gotoh nodded as well.

>"I suspect you could get away with it," Gotoh said. "But you'd have to

hurry- your standby shift starts in just six hours, and it would take you
>an hour to get there and an hour to get back... IF there isn't too much

traffic. More likely than not, it'll take two or two and a half hours each
>way- which means you won't have more than a couple of hours to do your

investigating."
>
Gomioka nodded. "We'll be back in time. See you in six hours."

>
After he left the office, Gotoh turned to Shinobu. "Hmm... he just might
>work out as a captain, after all."

>* * * * *

>Shinshi yawned. "What's going on? I thought we were off duty- I need

sleep." Murmurs of ascent joined him from most of the remaining crew of
>Unit 3.

>"We're police officers! We're never off duty!" Ohta snapped.

>"Then why do the charts say 'off duty, 0800-1600'?" Shinshi asked.

>"People, people!" Gomioka cautioned. "Settle down. I can't explain

anything until you're ready to listen." The bickering quickly stopped
>before he continued. "I need to ask you all to voluntarily join me in an

investigation. For some reason, our labors have not arrived yet. Trying
>to figure out WHY they hadn't come, I attempted to make contact with the

quartermaster corps. However, there was no answer on the other end of the
>phone. Several attempts to call others in the same building also failed...

which means that there's a chance something seriously wrong is going on.
>The duty officers can't investigate since it's only a conjecture based on

the wildest of speculation, but WE aren't on duty."

>
Kanuka nodded to herself. "You need us to go in and poke around to see
>what's going on, don't you? Well, I volunteer."

>Ohta nodded. "I will, as well."

>Shinshi sighed. "I really shouldn't- I should be getting my sleep, and my

wife would KILL me if she found out I was risking my neck unnecessarily
>like this, but... what the hell. I'll go, to."

>Yamane Seiroku, Koichi Miyagi, and Yoshi Tobe all nodded at this. "We

won't let the first labor team get all the glory," Seiroku stated proudly.

>
"I'd like to take all three labors along, as well... just in case," Gomioka
>noted.

>Seiroku's face lit up. He started to grab his helmet and head for the Type
96, but Kanuka started moving first. Seiroku rushed up to her and caught
>her by the shoulder. She turned and glared at him, making him back off a
step and swallow.
>
"Um," he explained nervously. "I sort of have the unofficial position of
>third labor pilot in this unit."

>Kanuka opened her mouth to reply, but Gomioka intervened before she could
say anything. "I think we should let her take it out this time. You're
>totally untrained for the 96, but she's been a patlabor pilot long enough
to have piloted it before and is more likely to understand all its quirks."
>
"But captain-" Seiroku protested.
>
"We'll discuss whether to put her in that position permanently or have it
>alternate between you after we get our regular labors, but this is not a
normal situation."
>
Yamane's face fell. "Yes, sir," he said sullenly, walking at a much slower
>pace for his 97's command car.

>Gomioka nodded. "Everyone, board up and move 'em out!"

>* * * * *

>Gomioka, for the first time, felt as though he was in complete control of
his command. Even Ohta, the prototypical hothead, was obeying his commands
>to stay cool and not alert the populace- after all, there was no proof that
anything was wrong, yet.
>
The three labor transports (the third driven by Gomioka himself) made their
>way through the streets of Tokyo, thankfully not attracting TOO much
attention. It actually helped that the patlabors were obsolete, for once,
>as most of the populace assumed they were being taken to be scrapped.

>"We're getting close," Gomioka informed the others through the radio.
"Let's pull over two blocks from the building. Command car operators and
>labor transport officers will raise their labors and then join me as I go
in on foot, and we'll keep in touch with everyone else."

>
"Yes, sir," the labor crews confirmed over the radio.

>
Gomioka pulled his transport into the empty parking lot of a shopping
>center that was under renovation. "You all set back there?" he asked
Kanuka.
>
"Yes, sir."
>
Gomioka pressed the 'raise labor' button. Once he was fairly certain that
>the Type 96 was safely raised, he opened the door and popped out as quickly
as he could. Shinshi, Yamane Seiroku, and Yoshi Tobe quickly joined him.
>Together, they made their way down the last two blocks as casually as they
could, then slipped inside the building which housed the independant

>contractors and logistics sections for the police.

>A pretty female receptionist decked out in a typical police woman's uniform
greeted them upon their entrance. "Hello, can I help you?"

>
Gomioka, poised for action, was a bit surprised at the casual greeting.
>"Um, maybe. We tried to call several times to several different offices
throughout the building and got no response..."
>
The receptionist nodded. "Yes. We've had some trouble with the phone system today."

>Gomioka sighed. He had been so geared up for action that it was a severe
disappointment to find out that nothing serious was wrong. Oh, well- while he was here....

>"I initially called to try and get in touch with the Quartermaster's Corps.
May I ask what office they are in?"
>
The receptionist nodded. "Certainly, sir... just let me look them up."
>She rifled through the papers on her desk, searching for something.

>Gomioka pulled out his radio and made contact with the labors. "Stand
down- false alarm," he ordered.
>
Shinshi, pacing impatiently, kicked something with one of his feet.
>Bending down to look closer at it, he blinked. "Um, Captain Gomioka, sir?"

>"Yes?"

>"What do you make of this?" he asked, handing him a police badge.

>Gomioka looked at it in surprise. The badge itself was dented and the
clasp was violently twisted. He couldn't quite puzzle out why it had been so badly damaged, unless it was torn off of a police jacket and stomped on
several times....
>
Approaching the receptionist desk, he looked over at the attractive woman
>and said, "Excuse me, but it appears as if-" He stopped, seeing a foot
stick out from under the desk. "Hey, what's going on here? Oof!" he
>didn't have time to finish as the receptionist, quick as lightning, flashed
a punch out at his chin which knocked him five feet back and leapt over the
>desk to continue the fight.

>Gomioka watched, his vision dimming, as the other three mobilized, running
to aid their fallen captain. Shinshi was caught by a kick to the face,
>sending him into an unconscious slumber. Yoshi Tobe went down just as
fast, leaving Seiroku to face the woman alone. He nodded imperceptively,
>and the woman charged. Seiroku was apparently a bit of a martial artist,
successfully deflecting several of her blows and returning some of her own.
>
Gomioka attempted to rise and help him, but that proved to be a mistake.
>With his equilibrium knocked out of whack by the blow given him, he wasn't
able to keep from stumbling and falling face-first onto the floor in front
>of himself, unconscious.

>* * * * *

>He woke up feeling someone rustling around behind him, cords being tied to
his wrists. Not giving whoever it was a chance to finish, Gomioka lashed
>out and broke free of the attacker's grip, snapping the not-quite-tied rope
apart.
>
"Whoa, sir!" Seiroku cried. "I was just trying to untie you!"

>
Gomioka blinked in the dim light. Shinshi and Yoshi were nowhere to be
>found. "Where are we?"

>"A storage closet, I think. I just got myself free and was working on your
knots when you attacked."
>
"Sorry about that," Gomioka apologized. "I thought you were trying to tie
>me up. Where are Tobe and Mikiyashi?"

>"Dunno, sir. You know as much as I do- except I was awake when they
dragged me here. That woman pinned me to the ground and chained me up in
>my own hand-cuffs, dammit! Thankfully, I always hide a spare key for them
in my shoe."
>
Gomioka nodded, and stood up cautiously. He had a bad headache, but
>otherwise felt fine. "I doubt they could have locked us in here... whadya
say we go find our fellow officers then get the labors to come and bring
>these idiots to justice?"

>Seiroku nodded. "Sounds like a plan. Let's go."

>Gomioka and Seiroku burst out of the closet, looking both ways. An armed
man standing outside looked at them in shock, but Seiroku knocked him out
>with a chop to the neck before he could raise an alarm.

>"Let's split up- we'll cover more ground," Gomioka suggested.

>Seiroku nodded. "Were do we regroup?"

>"Try and get back to the parking lot where we left the labors and let them
all know what's going on."
>
"Yes, sir." With that, Seiroku ran off down the right corridor.

>
Gomioka looked at the unconscious man at his feet and sighed. "If I had
>time to wait for you to wake up, I'd ask you who the hell you are, but I
don't have time...." With that, he grabbed the man, dragged him back into
>the closet, and tied the man up with the ropes that had initially been
secured to his own wrists, and then he moved on.
>
* * * * *
>
Ohta frowned. "It's been WAY too long since the Captain said to stand
>down. Where are they?"

>Kanuka sighed. "It's probably just taking them a long time to track down
our Labor shipment. If anything had gone wrong, they would have called
>us... but if it makes you feel THAT much better, you can prepare your labor
for action again."
>
Ohta smiled. "Yes, ma'am!" he cried happily, saluting. Dashing off, he
>returned to his 97's cabin and set about getting it combat ready.

>Kanuka sighed. "One of these days, he's going to have to tone down

that
enthusiasm," she noted, heading over to her 96 to prepare it for combat

>herself. "But for once, maybe he's got the right idea- it HAS been an
awfully long while, come to think of it...."

>
* * * * *

>
Gomioka looked around, uncertain of where to go next. Then he heard

>muffled voices coming from another room.

>"Most of the prisoners have been released, thanks to the SV2's untimely
interruption. Without the element of surprise on our side, we won't be

>able to hold them off for long. Give me the papers, I'll hide it from them
even if we're captured," the first one was saying.

>
"Okay, here. I'll go and cause a distraction, you just get the hell out of

>here," the second replied.

>"Use the Brocken. That thing will cause such a disturbance they'd miss a
tank trying to sneak away."

>
"I'll get right on it."

>
A man ran out of the room, which for the first time Gomioka noticed was the

>office given to Shinohara Heavy Industries as the SV2's chief contractor,
and stopped. "He's here, already! Run!" The man crashed into Gomioka,

>taking him down and allowing the second man to run out a back way.

>Gomioka, using his martial arts training, flipped the attacker off of him
and stood up. With three blows, he disabled the guy and took off in hot

>pursuit of the man carrying the stolen documents. By the time he got out
the back entrance, however, the second man was gone. What was worse was

>the man he thought he'd knocked out was also gone when he returned to tie
him up.

>
"Damn. And they've got a Brocken, too- the 97's don't stand a chance

>against it," he muttered to himself. "And now they know I've escaped-
this is bad." He tried to use a nearby phone to call for backup, but found

>that the line was dead.

>Moving on, he searched the halls, moving as quietly as he could and
listening for anything which might be a warning of an attack. Eventually,

>he heard something, but it wasn't anything to do with an attack.

>"Mmmm- mmmm!" came a muffled shout from a nearby closet. Gomioka opened
the door and found someone tied up and gagged. To Gomioka's relieve, he

>recognized the guy.

>"Shinshi!" he cried with relieve. "Hold on, let me help you."

>Once he got the gag off, he started working on his bonds.

>"Yoshi's in here, too," Shinshi explained. "We've gotta hurry- I heard
someone saying that they've got a Brocken to cover their escape."

>
"I heard the same," Gomioka said as he finished untying the knots. "Tried

>to call in support from headquarters, but I found that the phones

are dead.
 Let's get Tobe free and get the hell out of here."

>
"Yes, sir," Shinshi said, working on Yoshi Tobe's feet as Gomioka started

>on the hands. Together, they had him free in a matter of a few seconds,
and he tore the gag off of himself.

>
"Yuck!" Yoshi Tobe said.

>
"Seiroku's already freed most of the building's personnel, I think- he's

>supposed to meet us over by the labors," Gomioka explained. "If we get
seperated, regroup there." With that, they started to make their way out

>of the building.

>* * * * *

>Kenji Iguchi, who hadn't mounted up in his labor like Ohta and Kanuka had,
blinked in surprise. "What the hell!" Pulling out his radio, he shouted,

>"Ohta, Kanuka! There's a Type 7 Brocken coming down the street!"

>"All right! Finally, some action!" Ohta roared, pulling out in his labor
and running down the street in the direction of the Brocken.

>
"Ohta, wait!" Kanuka shouted, pulling out in her own 96 and following him.

>"You aren't in an Ingram- you don't stand a chance against a military
labor!"

>
Ohta ignored her in his usual battle craze. Running as fast as he could,

>he rammed the 97's shoulder into the chest of the Brocken. The military
labor, not expecting the move, staggered back, nearly falling before its

>auto-stabilizers kicked in and helped it to right itself- just in time to
receive a blow to the head from the 97's combat baton.

That rattled the

>Brocken, but did nothing more than that. The 97 just wasn't strong enough
to do any significant damage to the other labor.

>
Before it could go on the offensive, however, Kanuka pulled up in her 96,

>attempting a similar set of moves. This time, however, the Brocken was
prepared for it, and counterattacked, smashing Kanuka's labor on the nose

>and digging it into the ground. Kanuka backed off and waited, hoping the
Brocken would make a mistake it could use.

>
While this battle was going on, several people ran out the building, using

>the Brocken for cover as they boarded a nearby bus. When the bus was
filled, it drove off, leaving the military labor to fend for itself.

>
Kenji Iguchi's labor joined them a minute later, and together Unit 3's

>three labors were able to hold the Brocken to a stand-off.

>* * * * *

>Gomioka, Shinshi, and Yoshi Tobe made their way through the halls,
frequently running into panicked groups of police contractors or other

>police officers trying to escape from the now-departed terrorists who had
struck the building. Someone had pulled a fire alarm, and in certain

>sections of the building the sprinkler system had gone off.

>"Seiroke!" Yoshi called, spying their comrade amidst the chaos of the
situation. "Over here!"
>
Yamane Seiroke ran over to the group. "Sir, I found the building's REAL
>staff locked up in the warehouse and released them," he said, saluting.

>Gomioka returned the salute. "Good work. Let's keep moving- there's a
Brocken out there and we need to find a way to call for re-inforcements."
>
Seiroke nodded. "The way out's just down these stairs- come on."

>
In less than a minute, the four men reached the front doors and bolted
>outside-

>Only to leap out of the way to avoid the foot of a retreating 97. The
battle had been going on for several minutes, and the damage to the
>surrounding neighborhood was astounding. The damage to the labors was
relatively minor, however- there were some dents in the heavy armour of the
>Brocken, and Kanuka's 96 was missing its left grapple arm, but the 97s
weren't visibly damaged at all.
>
"Good god, don't tell me they're actually trying to stop it on their own?"
>Gomioka said.

>* * * * *

>Kanuka saw the rest of her unit leave the police building just as the
Brocken attempted a feint. When she saw it charging in on Ohta's labor,
>she saw her opportunity arise. Using the overdrive on the 96, she managed
to push it up to almost the Brocken's speed- and approaching from the side,
>crashed right into the military labor's knee.

>With a loud *crunch* the Brocken fell, and Ohta's labor descended on it,
stabbing with as much force he could muster into the fallen labor's back,
>killing the power source.

>"Take that, you terrorist scum!" he shouted, pulling his baton out and
about to bring it down again, when he noticed Kanuka's labor wasn't moving.
> "Kanuka, you okay in there?"

>"Just fine, but I don't think this labor'll ever see action again."

>* * * * *

>In the end, even though the Brocken had been defeated, there was no way to
tell if the SV2 had succeeded or failed. Had the papers successfully been
>stolen? No one knew, and even if they had been, whoever had done it was
also a mystery. The captured labor pilot wasn't talking and the various
>offices had been so badly rifled or damaged it would take weeks to sort out
what was missing.
>
But the mood of the third unit was high. Successful or not, they had
>finally proven to themselves that they were an effective unit- and, better
yet, they were now getting new labors to replace their obsolete old
>vehicles.

>"Well," Gomioka said as he told the story of the mission, "The

Ancient
>Warriors DID prove to be somewhat useful... just as we're
getting rid of
>them, too. Oh, yeah- I never did find out what happened to our
new
>labors."
>
Gotoh put a hand behind his head. "Oh, yeah- we got a call
shortly after
>you left. It was Shinohara Heavy Industries; they apologized for
the
>delay, but said that they wouldn't be able to deliver until
the 22nd due to
>problems with the transport trucks."

>Gomioka sighed. "Well, only a couple more days of dealing with the
Ancient
>Warriors and then we're finally rid of them."

>
Mechanics Chief Sakaki, listening into the tale for his own
reasons,
>smirked. "Ancient Warriors. I like that name for them... say, when
we get
>the new labors, what're we going to be doing with the old
97s and 96s."
>
Gotoh shrugged. "I understand they'll just be mothballed again,
for the
>next time we expand the Special Vehicles."

>Sakaki nodded. "Hmm... might I have permission to take them to my
home
>instead of mothball them? I'd like to try and keep them
maintained, maybe
>tweek them up a little more. That way, we'll always have an extra
labor or
>two if we need to send some back to the factory for
maintenance... and I'd
>have something to help train a young cadet or two with."

>Gotoh looked to Gomioka, who shrugged, and Shinobu, who nodded. "I
don't
>see why not... we'll have to get an O.K. from headquarters
for you to work
>on them off-site, but if you're willing to maintain them on your own
budget
>I don't think anyone will have any complaints."

>
* * * * *

>
Sitting in his office, a man opened an envelope. "Ah, here we
go- finally,
>found what we were looking for. Excellent. With these plans,
we're
>another step closer to our final goal."
>
"But we sacrificed a Brocken to get those plans. Are they worth
it?" a
>second figure asked.

>The first man stood up, looking over the diagrams of the Ingram and
its
>variants. "Yes, I'd say so," he said, adjusting his
square-rimmed glasses.
> "I'd say so."

>-----
Next Episode: Someone finds Gotoh's
personal notebook, including notes on
>all of the members of the SV2. This episode may help those of you
who are
>confused about who all the new people are...

>

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the
True Fiancee
> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
> <p><p>

13. Episode 13: Patlabor's Personnel Files

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 13: Patlabor: Personnel Files

>February 22, 2000

>"Hmm, I need the stapler..." one of the SV2 officers said, searching
through the top of Gotoh's desk. The three captains were all out of the office, but that didn't stop people from coming in to file reports.

>As the officer looked through the clutter on the desk, he knocked a book
off the table. Picking it up and casually glancing through it out of

>curiosity, he noticed something.

>"Hey, is that my name? And Shinobu's... and Kanuka's... and- whadya know?
Everyone's name is here. What is this, exactly?"

>
Turning it to the beginning, he read the title page.

>
"Thoughts on my co-workers in the SV2, by Luitenant Gotoh. Begun

>1123/98."

>
The officer blinked. "LUITENANT Gotoh? This thing must be from back when

>the SV2 was first formed. Interesting."

>He flipped to the next page.

>"Shinobu Nagumo," it read.

>"Captain of the SV2, Division 2. Age: 32 (hey- she's my age! Woohoo!).
A real looker. Very competent. Should probably be in a higher position-

>should investigate why she isn't. I'd love to ask her out, but she's my
superior- it could hurt my career if we were caught. I'm due for a

>promotion, though- maybe I'll have a chance when it comes.

>"Updates:

>"1229/98- I got promoted to captain. We're of equal rank, now, and I'm no

>longer under her command- I can date her without being punished by internal
affairs. I'm gonna ask her out for new years.

>
"1/01/99- I got shot down. No explanation why from her- maybe she's

>already got a boyfriend, but she seemed reluctant to admit it. I'm not
giving up, though- she didn't seem to mind the attention.

>
"10/04/99- Oh, god, what a road trip! We wound up sharing a hotel room in

>a love hotel. Shinobu is SO cute! Too bad she caught me before I got a
chance to see her in the bath. She didn't seem to mad about it, though,

>after she was done with the bath. I didn't get any sleep at all, though-
not only was I just using a sofa and a towel to try and get comfortable

>with, but she was in the room the whole time. I went over to just watch
her for a few moments- just watching her is a pleasure- and found she was

>still awake as well. Then she checked on me a few minutes later. I don't
know- she seemed rather nervous. Was there a chance that she thought
>something might actually happen? If so, does that mean she might find me a
little attractive? At least a very little?

>
"1/4/2000- Went to kiss Shinobu on New Years, but she dodged. It didn't
>help there was a huge power-out at the time. Sigh.
>"128/00- Shinobu got drunk today. I read a postcard from someone who I
>think is a former lover named Tsuge. All I know about him is that he
established a school in the Police Academy that was a
predecessor to the
>Patlabor Training Facility, and that was where she met him. I also know he
was married- which is a bad, BAD thing. Shinobu kissed me for the first
>time today, but as good as it was I couldn't let her do it again. Not like
that anyway- not when she's on the rebound.

>
"1/29/00- Shinobu and I talked about last night. She says to forget last
>night happened, but encouraged me to continue pursuing her. I've gotta
move real carefully, now- don't want to move in so fast that I become a
>short-lived rebound relationship for her. I'm also not certain she's
entirely over that postcard."
>
The officer reading Gotoh's journal sat down at his desk and leaned back.
>"Interesting- very interesting," he said. "I always thought there was
something wierd about their relationship. I wonder what this book has to
>say about the rest of the wierdos here."
>Turning the page to the next tab, he continued reading.

>"Tetsuo Gomioka.
>"Very junior luitenant. Will probably replace me when I'm promoted. Very
serious. A couple years younger than I am. He's the pilot of Labor 1, so
>I guess that means we're equals- both luitenants piloting a labor. He's
very good, technically, but I don't know how good he is with people. He
>seems a bit arrogant. Other than that, he's okay. Oh, yeah- he's married,
but I don't get the feeling it's all that happy a marraige- he seems to
>avoid his wife and she seems quite jealous and suspicious of him.
>"Updates:
>"412/99- Shinobu got mad when we she found out her unit was being used to
>develop military equipment. Gomioka found out about her anger, and so
abandoned the labor that was the cause of this so as to make her happy,
>despite the belief that the older technology of his labor made his
assignment dangerous. He might have a crush on her, too- is he a rival for
>Shinobu's affection?
>"1227/99- Tomorrow gets promoted to command the newly established third
>unit. VERY BAD IDEA in my opinion- he's not ready for command.

Shinobu,
however, thinks he can handle it. I'm going along with it for her, but I
>fear what it might do to Division 2.

>"220/00- He did a good job today. Maybe he's growing into the job. We'll
>see."

>The officer sighed. "Not much to go on, there. Odd, though- I never saw
anything between him and Shinobu. Then again, I haven't been around here
>for too long. Who else is mentioned in here?"

>Continuing through the book, he read, "Ohta Isao.

>"Headstrong firebrand. A bit triggerhappy. Pilot of labor 3 (a Type 96-
he's only called on in emergencies. He also acts as the command car
>officer for Gomioka's labor, but he usually have to ignore half of what he
said). Ambitious brown-noser. Crack shot, adequate hand-to-hand ability.
>As likely to cause problems as to solve him. He has a rivalry with
Shinohara. Oldest person in the division who isn't an officer- though
>still just about my age. He'd do better if he could calm down.

>"11/99- He was given to me to be one of my two labor pilots in my new
>unit, as part of a deal to get Shinohara. Still need to find another-
Shinohara, who would be my top choice, is VERY reluctant to do it. I'm
>trying to convince S. to take the assignment by making him Ohta's command
car operator. A few weeks of that and poor Asuma'll be begging for any
>other position.

>"120/99- The Shinohara experiment is failing. I'm getting new labors- and
>a couple of new labor-trained personnel- in a few days. I'm keeping an eye
on someone I bumped into on my recent trip to the academy- Noa Izumi.
>Izumi has the same never-say-die attitude that Ohta has and Shinohara
lack, but also is in control of herself enough to not be a threat to the
>public. I'll put them together if possible. Maybe between them I'll get
what I want- Asuma's tactical skill combined with Ohta's stubborn will
>minus Ohta's hair trigger. At any rate, I'm moving Shinohara off of Ohta's
team- Shinshi's the most likely candidate to replace him, unless one of the
>new recruits turns out to have promising chemistry with him.

>"126/99- PERFECT! An American officer just arrived, hoping to join our
>unit. She also has the sense to realize piloting a labor of her own is
impossible, despite her impressive skills in the field. She's a firebrand
>in her own way- maybe she can tame Ohta down a bit. At any rate, she's
better than Shinshi would be.
>
"6/24/99- Bad news. Kanuka had to leave, meaning I'm going to have to make
>Shinshi Ohta's backup, after all. He can do the job, but it'll be a
serious struggle for him. I'm going to search all my resources for a
>replacement.

>"71/99- Found a replacement for Shinshi. Takeo Kumagami. She's a

>luitenant, so she'll have his respect like Kanuka did, though she's
inexperienced. We'll work on it.

>
"12/27/99- Pushing Ohta off on Gomioka. I feel for the guy, I really do,

>but after dealing with Ohta for a full year now I think it's time he became
someone else's problem. It's sort of a lateral promotion for Ohta, but

>it'll probably be good for his career in the long run."

>The officer reading smirked. "Yep, that sounds like what it would be like
dealing with Ohta, all right. I wonder who's next?"

>
"Asuma Shinohara," the book said.

>
"A bit of a punk, but considering what I know of his brother's suicide,

>that's to be expected. Does NOT get along with his father, who heads the
largest labor manufacturer in Japan. Despite this, he still is able to use

>his background in the labor industry to his advantage. Knows the technical
ability of just about every labor out there, and an impressive tactition,

>as well. I think I'll take him under my wing. I just wish I could
convince him to become a labor pilot- I think he'd be good at that

>position. Don't know why he doesn't like being one, he just does.

Has a
rivalry with Ohta. Twenty four years old.

>
"1/1/99- Asuma's been assigned to my unit. I begged Shinobu for him,

>shegave him to me... but I had to take Ohta, too. I'll make Asuma Ohta's
command car operator- might convince Shinohara that there are worse jobs

>than being a labor pilot.

>"123/99- Heh... Asuma met the academy girl I've been keeping my eye on.

>She isn't even officially part of our unit yet, and already they're working
together like a great team. Maybe I don't need to try and make him a

>pilot, after all- he seems to be good with the command car position.

>"126/99- Asuma and Noa came up against each other in labor competition

>today. Asuma was holding his own (even though it had degenerated into a
sort of elementary school play-fight, I could tell they were about even)

>but then 'his leg suddenly gave out.' I know better than that- he threw
the match to her. I don't mind, though- he made up for it by showing that

>he and Noa will be an EXCELLENT team as forward and backup. After he was
eliminated, he, without even being asked, assumed the position of command

>for her... using his advice, Noa advanced to the finals and even fought the
extremely good and heavily experienced pilot Kanuka Clancy (from NY) to a

>standstill, losing only because of a simple rookie mistake (running out of
power).

>
"6/2/99- Asuma and Noa have had a huge fight. I'm going to have to

>separate them when we go on this next mission, and hope that the temporary
separation will help them make up.

>
"6/10/99- Asuma actually decided to pilot a labor, for once. He did it to
>rescue Noa during a fight with some strange- but very powerful-labor.
Seems to me they made up.
>
"8/2/99- Asuma was severely injured in battle against a (different)
>super-powerful labor. He was test-driving the mass-production labor, and
claims that it was not running smoothly at all. I believe him. At any
>rate, he'll be out of the action for a bit.

>"87/99- Asuma aggravated his injury because he wouldn't listen to the
>doctors advice and came to help us out against the black labor.

>"115/99- Asuma had a class reunion today. He's acting very distracted,
>like something strange happened at the reunion. Actually, he's been doing
that for a few days, now, come to think of it. Wonder what's going on...
>
"12/16/99- Asuma took Noa somewhere today. Considering it's the

>anniversary of his brother's suicide, I can guess where.

>"17/00- Asuma went to dinner with his father. Curious- perhaps they are
>attempting some sort of reconciliation? At any rate, he was rather upset
before he left.
>
"1/18/00- The maintenance squad had a little spat with him because he was
>rude to Natsume. I think Sakaki stepped in and settled it, though.

>"128/00- Asuma's taking personal time off to look after Noa. He'll

>probably be gone as long as she is- which is about a month, I think."

>The man reading the journal chuckled. "Of course Shinohara'd take a month
off to look after Noa. They're lovers, aren't they? I wonder why Gotoh
>didn't mention the depth of their relationship in this journal, though?
Maybe it's in Noa's entry. Ah, well, wonder who's next."

>
There were a couple of entries the man passed by- people who were no longer
>part of SV2, including Akito Kenichi, the most recent to have departed,
looking for more relevant entries. He stopped when he got to Toru Sasaki.
>
"Grizzled veteran- he's been a Patlabor pilot since the program got started
>in 1996. Retired from piloting to become a command car operator in 1998.
Refuses promotions and claims the new labors give him motion sickness-
>which seems odd to me, if the old ones didn't. Typical veteran, except he
has a thing for keeping his uniform clean."
>
There were no updates on him, and so the person reading turned another
>page.

>"Hideki Nomo,

>"Labor driver. Was a labor pilot from the start of the industry alongside
Toru Sasaki, until he lost a hand in the line of duty. Unphasable by

>outside events. Otherwise uninteresting."

>That seemed a rather... pointless... entry. Again, the page turned.

>"Shinshi Mikiyashi

>"Harmless.

>"126/99- Make that Mostly Harmless."
>
For some reason, the reader of the journal was expecting a longer entry for
>Shinshi, considering certain things. There was no mention of Shinshi's
marriage, his rivalry with Ohta, the triggers which would upset him, or
>anything. Then again, Shinshi probably WAS just mostly harmless. Oh,
well- on to the next entry.
>
"Yuhki Watanabe
>
"Returned to Unit 1 to replace me when we created Unit 2- apparently, he
>couldn't hack it the first time he joined. I wasn't part of the SV2 when
he was first here, but apparently he was just too nervous in combat
>situations to deal with it. He's still rather nervous, but maybe he's over
it by now."
>
Again, there were no updates- Gotoh apparently didn't have much to say
>about the members of Unit 1. There was only one more to deal with,
however, until they reached the entries on the latest crop of rookies.
>
"Tazaki Hiroaki
>
"Another man brought in to fill up Unit 1's ranks. He's a transport
>driver.

>"Updates:

>"1227/99- Promoted on permanent basis to become command car operator for
>Yuhki."

>Another real short entry- barely worth reading. Maybe the next one would
prove more interesting.
>
"Hiromi Yamazaki
>
"A gentle giant. Really quiet. I'm not entirely sure why he joined the
>force- he spends more time worrying about his tomato garden and caring for
the hens than he does caring about police work. He's the first person to
>have my unit as his first assignment- should be getting another one soon
(I'm looking at Noa Izumi, a delightful young girl who I hope has the
>ability to go with that enthusiasm). He'll be on the not-yet-formed labor
team 2.
>
"Updates:
>
"1/26/99- Found the rest of Labor Team 2. Noa Izumi and Asuma Shinohara.
>It seems as if they'll have pretty good chemistry.

>
That entry was a bit longer than the last few, but still left something to
>be desired. Oh, well- there really wasn't much to know about Hiromi,
outside of that, as far as the reader knew. On to the next entry.
>
"Noa Izumi," it said.
>
"What a find. The tests all show that she should be a barely average cop,
>but there are a few things about her that make me think those tests

are all
wrong. Namely, she's already shown herself a skilled labor pilot, almost
>singlehandedly rescuing the new Type 98 labor as it was being stolen.
That, along with her enthusiasm and affinity for her labor, all show she's
>perfect for her position. That, and the chemistry she has with Asuma
Shinohara all make me think she's a tremendous find.

>
"Updates:

>
"1/26/99- She's named her labor Alphonse. She also won the position of
>pilot for labor 1 over Ohta. Deserves it, too. She fought Kanuka Clancy,
who is reputed to be the best Patlabor pilot in the world, to a standstill,
>losing in the end due to having neglected to keep her eyes on the power
guage. She DID have an unfair advantage, however- Asuma was helping her.
>As I said, good chemistry between those two.
>"62/99- Noa and Asuma had a spat. I'll work on fixing them up- I'd hate
>to lose as good a team as that over something stupid.

>"610/99- Spat seems to be resolved. Asuma saved Noa's life in a labor
>battle today.
>"87/99- Noa's fight against the black labor nearly sent her into a nervous
>breakdown. It'll take her a while to recover from this one.

>"1011/99- Noa's second fight against the black labor ended much better for
>her. I don't think we'll be seeing it again.
>"1015/99- Noa had a toothache today. It didn't exactly make her happy,
>and Asuma teased her about it constantly. She seems to hate going to a
dentist...
>
"11/18/99- We went on our first unit vacation this week. Noa seemed a
>little upset that she couldn't get drunk despite everyone else being so.
Odd, that.
>
"12/16/99- Noa went with Asuma to visit his brother's grave.

>
"1/7/00- Noa seems upset today. Don't know why."

>
"1/28/00- Injured with freak sports accident. She was trampled, and will
>be in the hospital almost a month. Asuma's keeping her company."

>Finally, a longer entry. There were a few things missing, however. Like
with Asuma's entry, there wasn't any mention of the two of them going out.
>Well, except maybe for that repeated mention of 'chemistry,' but that
doesn't seem to be enough. Maybe Gotoh just didn't care... or perhaps he
>was afraid someone might go snooping through his books, and didn't want to
risk it being someone who might harm said relationship. Come to think of
>it, the officer reading the book could be just the sort of person Gotoh was
avoiding mention of the relationship for. Oh, well- next entry.

>
"Kanuka Clancy
>
"Reputed to be the best patlabor pilot in the world. Honestly, I think Noa
>Izumi will probably be better than she is, but at the moment I guess that
she's a little better. An American who's joined our unit temporarily. In
>theory, to learn our 'tactics' or some bullshit like that. The truth is
she's being exiled for a temper- she and Ohta think a little alike. I'm
>going to make her Ohta's command car operator- the two of them might hit it
off, you never know. She DOES have a lot of skills outside of being good
>with labors. She seems to be trying to out-Japanese us Japanese. She even
speaks our language better than her native one! Rather arrogant about her
>abilities, however. She'll only be staying with us for 6 months.

>"Updates:

>"624/99- Went back to America.
>
"8/4/99- Kanuka's come back for a little while, to help us out while
>Takeo's in the hospital. Should be interesting.

>"812/99- Back to America.
>
"9/15/99- Kanuka's back AGAIN. This time, it's to help us with E. Hoba
>problem. Good thing, too, since Kumagami's in Hong Kong, pursuing a lead
on the guy who shot her.
>
"9/20/99- Back to America.
>
"10/7/99- Kanuka showed up again, with her Grandmother. I think her
>grandmother's planning to move here in a few months.

>"1011/99- Kanuka helped us out with the Black Labor again.

>
"10/15/99- Back to America.
>
"11/18/99- Kanuka was able to join us for the first unit vacation. Takeo
>was there, too- and BOY did the sparks fly. Both of them were involved in
a contest of one-upmanship (poor Ohta- he got the worst of it from the both
>of them!) that I was a little concerned would end in a serious catfight.
It ended peacefully, however
>
"11/20/99- Back to America.
>
"12/26/99- Back here to participate in Gomioka's promotion ceremony.
>Sometimes I wonder why her home police department keeps letting her go,
considering how good a cop she is.
>
"12/31/99- Kanuka's asked for a position in our unit because her

>Grandmother's dying and she wants to be able to stay in Japan and look
after her. I can't do anything, myself, but I was able to make
>arrangements for a unit of the street cops to take her in temporarily. She
doesn't like the idea, though.
>
"1/7/00- She's back in the SV2, having been given her old job back of
>taming Ohta in Unit 3. Heh... well, she got what she wanted, I guess."

>The reader chuckled. 'Taming' Ohta- yeah, that sounded like the position
his command car officer would be given.

>
"Takeo Kumagami," the next page read.
>
"A supercop, sort of like Kanuka but without the background in labors.
>Terrified of the supernatural. Looks a little like Noa, but with different
colored hair. Putting her in charge of Ohta for now-she's really more
>interested in using us as a stepping-stone for promotion than anything.

>"Updates:

>"82/99- She's been shot and is in the hospital.
>
"8/23/99- On duty again. She doesn't seem fully recovered, yet, but
>physically she's fine.

>"910/99- She took some personal leave to take a trip to Hong Kong. She
>claims she has an idea about the man who shot her.

>"920/99- She's returned. Apparently, she was unsuccessful. She arrived
>just in time to miss the E. Hoba incident.

>"1011/99- Interesting. She has a connection to this 'Richard Wong'

>character.

>"1118/99- Kanuka showed up for the unit vacation, but the two of them
>didn't exactly get along.

>"1216/99- Odd. I didn't expect her to turn down the promotion we were
>offering. Instead, she claims she wants MY job! She can have it, if she
wants it."
>
So, Kumagami wasn't as ambitious about her career as she seemed. The
>reader filed that little bit of information away as being possibly useful
in the future- there was someone he knew who might be interested in that.
>The man continued reading.

>"Koichi Miyagi." Ah! The first of the rookies.

>"Enthusiastic. VERY Enthusiastic. Smiles all the time. He's rather
creepy about it, in fact... I'm glad he's in Shinobu's unit and not mine.
>Labor Pilot."

>It was back to short entries with few if any updates, but that was to be
expected. These were people who hadn't been here nearly as long, and
>weren't as likely to make much of an impact on Gotoh's unit.
Next.

>"Ueki Mashimo

>"Doesn't care about his appearance. Has some sort of rivalry with Yamane
Seiroku. This is not a happy man. Physically reminds me of Inspector
>Matsui, however. Transport Driver. Assigned to Unit 1."

>"Updates:

>"128/00- Heard the OFFICIAL story of his and Seiroku's rivalry. Not sure
>I believe it, though. Getting into a fight because someone turned in the
other over some booze? Doesn't seem likely to me."

>
Next.
>
"Joudo Ishikawa
>
"Nice enough guy. Good labor pilot. Has a thing for Natsume

Kawai- but

>then, so do all the engineers. They're on the same team, so I guess
>there's a chance something could come of it. They'll just have to hide

>their relationship a bit. Internal affair would have their hide if they
>found out.

>
"Updates:

>
"1/6/00- Takeo reports that he was very effective. Imagine, a
NORMAL

>police officer piloting one of MY Labors. Unheard of."

>Heh, funny. Next.

>"Natsume Kawai.

>"Er, not much I can say about her. She's... cute. Seems to have
attracted
>the attention of the entire mechanics division, and her teammate Joudo

>Ishikawa. So far, only Joudo and Shige seem to be able to attract
her
>attention, however.

>
"Updates:

>
"12/29/99- Mental note: She and Asuma don't get along well.
Probably

>because she nearly killed Noa by accident today, but still...

>"118/00- The Maintenance Squad nearly killed Asuma on her behalf
today.

>Maybe we should think about trading her in with that idol singer who
was
>made an honorary part of our unit- Kana, I think her name was-
she'd be

>just as popular as Kana, and Kana would be better suited working
here than
>she would! Don't have anything against the girl, but she's barely able to

>succeed as a member of the team. I'll have to think about what to do
with
>her."

>
The man reading frowned. Gotoh hadn't mentioned it, but he had a
slight

>crush on Natsume, himself. Oh, well- it wasn't likely that Gotoh was
going
>to be able to replace her any time soon. Next.

>
"Yoshi Tobe

>
"Transport Driver, Unit 3. Don't know anything about him."

>
Heh... oh, well. Next.

>
"Kenji Iguchi

>
"Oops- I made this page to write about him when I got his file,
and forgot

>to put anything on it. Oh, well- I'll remember to come back to it
later.
No time, now."

>
It looked as if Gotoh STILL forgot to write anything about the
guy. From

>what the reader knew, he was a totally non-descript man.

Totally
>forgettable. It was almost as if the gods had decided to
toss in one extra

>person to put in situations where just one more man was needed. Oh,
well,
>it seemed pretty obvious there wasn't much of importance
about him.

>
Now, for the last entry.

>
"Yamane Seiroku.

>
"Interesting guy. He REALLY wanted to be a labor pilot, from
what I heard,

>but instead we had to assign him to be a command car operator. I
think
>Gomioka's talked to him, and decided to make him the pilot
for the third

>labor. His placement match was a little wierd- his first opponent's labor
was defective. I'd almost say it looked like sabatoge, but I've been

>assured that isn't possible. Part of unit 3. Very competant. Could be
the next Kanuka or Takeo as a command car operator. Has a rivalry with

>Ueki Mashimo.

>"128/00- If this is really why he and Ueki got into such a fued, I pity

>his nose. Broken HOW many times, now- and by the same person? Poor guy.

>"220/00- Gomioka has put him up for a commendation for excellence in the

>Quartermaster's Building break-in. First time I've ever known a Captain in
the SV2 to put their officers up for commendation to the high command-

>usually, that's done by public relations. Honestly, I think Noa and Asuma
both deserve commendations more than him, but I may approve the

>recommendation to boost Gomioka's morale. He needs a pat on the back for
finally getting his act together as captain. However, I think Mr.

>Seiroku-"

>The door opened, and the officer shut the book before anyone could catch
him reading it.

>
"Hello. What are you doing here?" Captain Gomioka said, entering the room.

>
"Finishing up a report, sir," the officer replied. "I was looking for a

>stapler, and knocked some things off of Captain Gotoh's desk."

>Gomioka nodded. "Carry on, then."

>The officer placed the book back on Captain Gotoh's desk, breathing a sigh
of relief. He didn't want to get caught reading that book... not that

>there was really anything that private in there, but it probably wasn't
anything that Gotoh wanted anyone else to read. It was rather interesting,

>however. Oh, well... now, where to find a stapler?

>-----
Next Episode: An unusual theft from Shinohara Industries has brought in

>some of the members of the second section to investigate- namely, Noa and
Asuma. Instead of helping the investigation, though, they're appropriated

>by Asuma's father for a little tete-a-tete.

>

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the True Fiancee

> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

> <p><p>

14. Episode 14: A Meeting with the Wolf

Received: from desaix (bethal5.sysnet.net [206.142.16.145])

> by unix6.sysnet.net (8.9.08.8.7) with ESMTP id TAA02921
> for desaix@sysnet.net; Wed, 29 Mar 2000 19:46:49 -0500
(EST)
Message-Id: 200003300046.TAA02921@unix6.sysnet.net
>From: "David A. Tatum" desaix@sysnet.net
To: desaix@sysnet.net

>Subject: PLB14.txt
Date: Wed, 29 Mar 2000 19:33:09 -0500

>X-MSMail-Priority: Normal
X-Priority: 3
>X-Mailer: Microsoft Internet Mail 4.70.1155
MIME-Version: 1.0

>Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1

>Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
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7581d7574776a19b2854edc23f1f2868

>
Patlabor: Personal Files

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>
Episode 14: A Meeting With the Wolf

>February 29, 2000

>Sakaki walked out onto the catwalk, surveying the work that was
going on.

>"Shige!" he barked, noticing something wrong.

>"Yes, chief?"

>"You missed a spot!"

>"Sorry, chief!"

>Shige buffed clean the dirty sensor, sighing.

>"Much better, Shige," Sakaki acknowledged.

>"Thank god Noa and Asuma are supposed to be back today," Shige
muttered. "I
won't have to keep waxing Alphonse any more."

>
"Shige!" Sakaki roared.

>
Shige flinched. "Yes, chief!"

>
"Don't forget to clean the monitors inside!"

>
"Right, chief."

>
Sigh.

>
* * * * *

>
"Well," the doctor said, looking over the results of Noa's
physical.

>"Looks like we can clear you for light duty today. If you keep up
this
rate of recovery, and don't strain yourself, you should be
completely fine

>in two weeks."

>"So, no Alphonse?" Noa pouted.

>"Er... Alphonse?" the doctor asked.

>"Her labor," Asuma explained simply.

>"I see," the doctor replied, though clearly he didn't. "No, I'm
afraid
not. No Alphonse for two weeks."

>
Noa sniffed sadly. "I miss him," she whimpered. Asuma squeezed
her

>shoulder reassuringly. Hopefully, she asked, "Are you sure? Can't I
even
take him out for a spin, if I don't do anything strenuous in
him?"

>
"Er...." The doctor wasn't entirely sure what to do. The woman
looked so

>desperate for the ability to use her labor, that he was reluctant to
say
no, but he would be lying if he said it was entirely safe.

>
"How about if she were to sit in Alphonse's cabin, but not use
him?" Asuma

>suggested.

>"That would be acceptable," the doctor said, grateful for having an option
>over COMPLETELY disappointing the girl.
>
Noa nodded. "Good. Come on, Asuma- let's get back to headquarters. I
>want to make sure the mechanics squad has been taking good care of them
>while I was gone."
>
"Gaack!" Asuma choked out, staggering after Noa as she dragged him off by
>the shirt.

>The doctor shook his head as they went. "Cute couple, but wierd girl. Oh,
well- next!"
>
In walked a man with square-rimmed glasses, smiling so widely his eyes were
>almost obscured by his cheeks. "Hello... I don't suppose you caught the
>name of that young couple that just left, did you?"
>
The doctor nodded. "Yes, I did- why?"
>
"Oh, I think I've met them before, but we've never been formally

>introduced. Oh, well. I suspect I'll meet them again later- we do seem to
>keep running into each other."
>
* * * * *

>
The car drove up into the Division 2 Parking lot. Asuma helped Noa out and
>they slowly made their way in the building. Asuma blinked- it was dark,
though he thought he saw movement in the shadows. Cautiously, he switched
>on the lights.

>Lined up from the doorway straight to Alphonse was the entire mechanics
>squad. Shige, with a stern-faced Chief Sakaki behind him, were waiting at
>the end of the line. Walking slowly while taking in the surprising
>turn-out, Noa and Asuma slowly made their way over to the two senior
>mechanics. As they did, the mechanics burst out into cheers and applause.

>"Welcome back, Noa!" Shige said, clapping her on the arm. "We've been
>keeping Alphonse clean and ready, just for you!"

>
Watching from the catwalk, Shinobu turned to Gotoh and said, "The mechanics
>sure are enthusiastic about her return."

>Gotoh nodded. "Of course. After all, thanks to Sakaki tutoring Noa in the
>basics of mechanics, she's becoming one of them. Besides, I think that
>Shige's a little glad that he won't have to buff and wax labor 1 any more."

>Shinobu raised an eyebrow. "I thought Noa was only approved for light
>duty."
>
Gotoh nodded. "Yep. Do you really think that's going to stop her from
>babying her pet labor, though?"

>Shinobu didn't have a chance to respond before Hiromi came up behind them.
"Captain Gotoh, sir- was a call for you. I picked it up- we're getting
>something faxed to us."

>"Who is it from?" Gotoh asked, still keeping his eyes on the jubilant
>mechanics and the bewildered couple.
>
"Someone from headquarters, sir, requesting two of our officers by name for
>a special detached assignment."

>Gotoh was a little surprised at that one. "Oh?"

>* * * * *

>"I'm sorry, Alphonse- I wish I could take you out to stretch your legs, but
the doctor says I'm not allowed to.... I missed you, Alphonse, did you
>miss me?"

>Asuma, sitting on the platform next to the labor's cockpit, rolled his eyes
as Noa cooed over Alphonse. He didn't really blame her- after all, it had
>been a little more than a month since she was able to even see Alphonse
(she'd refused to see him on the Valentines day she'd visited the
>headquarters, since she wouldn't be allowed to touch him then). Still, for
some reason he couldn't identify it was starting to get on his nerves.
>Perhaps it was the sheer enormity of the affection she was displaying for a
mere hunk of metal and circuitry, but for the first time he could remember
>he was honestly starting to get annoyed at Alphonse.

>Or maybe jealous, though he would never admit it.

>"Shinohara!" Gotoh's voice rang out from the railing above. "Could you an
Noa please come to my office?"
>
'Finally!' Asuma thought to himself. 'I won't have to put up with this
>anymore!'
>"Can't I have a few more minutes?" Noa whimpered.

>Asuma looked at her in the cockpit, her eyes wide and begging. "Captain,
could we have five more minutes?" he asked.
>
"Make it ten- this isn't that important," Gotoh answered.

>
"Thank you, sir!" Asuma replied. 'The things I put up with for that
>girl...'
>* * * * *

>Gotoh waited patiently at his desk until Noa and Asuma walked in. Noa was
sighing wistfully as she walked in, but Asuma looked a little relieved.
>
"Ah, finally. I trust you've had enough time to start readjusting
>yourselves to being back on the facilities?"

>"Yes, sir," Asuma replied quickly, not giving Noa a chance to say that she
wanted more time with Alphonse.
>
"Good. Noa, I know you are only cleared for light duty, but you and
>Shinohara were both specifically requested for a particular assignment.
I'm told that this mission shouldn't involve any strenuous work, but you
>have my permission to hold back if you think something it going to be too
difficult for you," Gotoh noted.
>
"Thank you, sir," Noa said.
>
"What's the assignment?" Asuma asked.
>
Gotoh handed him a folder. "Everything you need to know is in there."
>
Asuma opened the folder and read for a few seconds. His eyes widened.
>"You CAN'T be serious," he growled, slamming the folder back down on
Gotoh's desk.
>
"I am," Gotoh said. "I'm afraid that this is not an option for you,

>Shinohara. It's only an option for Noa because of her injuries. These
orders come from the police commissioners office, itself."

>
Noa, curious as to what all the fuss was about, picked up the folder and

>read it for herself.

>"The investigation of the assault against the Quartermasters Corps. on the
20th of February by unknown forces has resulted in the discovery of the

>theft of the classified technical documentation of a number of Shinohara
Heavy Industries productions, namely those for the Ingram, Peacemaker, and

>various preliminary designs for the Mass Production models. It is
requested that you send officers Noa Izumi and Asuma Shinohara to liason

>with Mr. Okami Shinohara of Shinohara Heavy Industries at his private
residence located at..."

>
So that was it. Asuma's father was involved. Of course he wouldn't want

>to deal with this sort of assignment. Quickly, Noa skimmed the rest of the
orders- apparently, they were only supposed to discuss the details of the

>case, and didn't necessarily need to figure out who it was who had engaged
in the theft. That was not so strange, but the selection of who it was to

>ask these questions was.

>"Captain Gotoh?" Noa queried. "Why are they asking US to conduct this
interview, anyway? I mean, we're just labor operatives- investigations

>like this aren't our job."

>Gotoh nodded. "You two were specifically requested, however. I suspect it
has something to do with Asuma's family connections."

>
Noa nodded. "That makes sense- it explains him. But why ME? What do I

>have to do with any of this?"

>Gotoh shrugged. "I don't know. If you want, you CAN refuse the
assignment...."

>
Noa shook her head. "No... I'm not able to pilot Alphonse, so I might as

>well have something to do while I'm restricted to light duties."

>Gotoh nodded. "Very well. You two might as well get going. I'll expect a
report when you get back on the third."

>
Asuma didn't look happy, but nodded and turned to leave. "Come on, Noa..."

>we'll take my personal car- it's more comfortable than the command car and
it's a six hour drive between here and dad's place."

>
* * * * *

>
Noa looked at Asuma in concern as he drove the car through the streets of

>downtown Tokyo in silence. They'd been on the road for almost an hour and
a half already, and so far he hadn't spoken one word since leaving Gotoh's

>office. His face took on a very dark look, and she was starting to get
worried.

>
"Do you mind if I turn on the radio?" Noa asked, trying to get him to say

>anything, even if it was just the word 'yes.'

>Without answering, Asuma reached for the controls to the stereo and flipped
it to some station playing 50's American Rock and Roll.
Noa sighed- that
>didn't work as she'd planned. It was time to be blunt.

>"Asuma, what's wrong? I thought you and your father worked things out last
time you saw him...."
>
Asuma blinked. "No... we didn't work things out. We got along better than
>we had in years, but we didn't really work anything out."

>"Well... well, maybe that's a good sign. Maybe you'll get along this time,
as well?" Noa suggested hopefully.
>
Asuma half-smiled. "Maybe. I doubt it, though."
>
"Wouldn't it be easier to get along better with him if you go into your
>meeting hoping for things to go well?"

>Asuma nodded quietly. "Yes, it would. And, believe it or not, I am. But
there's something I'm even more afraid of than just us 'not getting along.'
>A couple of things, actually."

>Noa blinked. "Really? What?"

>Asuma took a deep breath. "I'm afraid of what he might do to you- I'm
afraid he'll start controlling you like he's tried controlling everyone
>else he's ever met. And I'm afraid that if he tries, I'll get into a
serious fight with him, and I don't want you to see me like that- it can
>get rather ugly real quickly."

>Noa's eyes widened, and she started looking straight ahead instead of at
him. She hadn't even considered the possibility of her presence CAUSING
>fights between Asuma and his father- she'd always envisioned brokering a
peace that would END the fights between them. In fact, that was partly why
>she'd taken this assignment instead of declining it to stay near Alphonse.

>"I'm sorry, Asuma. I didn't mean to cause you any problems," Noa said
after a moment.
>
Asuma laughed. "That's okay, Noa- you cause me plenty of other problems.
>I'm used to it by now- one more problem won't matter."

>Noa glared at him. "Hey! That's not nice!" She wasn't really upset,
however- rather, she was relieved. Asuma was almost back to normal- well,
>at least he was almost back to being a pretty normal jerk, which come to
think of it WAS pretty normal for him.

>
* * * * *

>
It was getting dark when Asuma drove up to the Shinohara Mansion and
>parked.

>Asuma stepped out and opened the door for Noa. "Come on- we're probably
supposed to go in through the side door. The front door is reserved for
>'important' people. Tsukai will let us in."

>Noa got out of the car. "Tsukai?"

>"The chief of my father's servants. He's been around as long as I can
remember- probably since my grandfather was still alive and in his prime.
>He and Jitsuyama were more like fathers to me than dad ever

was."

>Noa clucked, but didn't say anything. She'd noticed that he'd started
becoming more somber the closer they got to the house, but didn't know what

>to do about it.

>Asuma paused at the door and turned to her, but refused to meet her eyes.

>"Noa," he said hesitantly. "Please... don't hold whatever happens against
me."

>
Noa blinked. "Huh?"

>
"I don't know what you think is going to happen this trip- you may be

>expecting to have some fun, to find out what my father's really like, maybe
even to see if you can patch the two of us up. Well, I don't know what

>it's really going to be like, either, but I suspect that there'll be a
number of times you won't see me at my best. Just... don't hold it against

>me. That's all I ask."

>Without waiting for an answer, Asuma rang the doorbell. Trying to answer
anyway, Noa reached over and squeezed his hand reassuringly. Asuma

>tentatively squeezed back, but quickly dropped his hand the moment the door
started to open.

>
The elder of the two Shinoharas, Okami, stood there, smiling benevolently.

>"Hello, son. Hello, Ms. Izumi. Welcome- I was expecting you. Come on in,
come on in...."

>
Asuma blinked. "Um... hi, dad. Where's Tsukai?"

>
Mr. Shinohara stepped aside, gesturing for his son and Noa to step in.

>"Taking care of the last-minute details behind dinner. I know it's been a
long trip- you haven't eaten yet, have you?"

>
Asuma almost answered 'yes' just out of spite, but his and Noa's matching

>stomach growls at the thought of food made it too obvious that they hadn't.
"Er, I guess we could eat a bite or two," he admitted, taking off his

>shoes and putting them in the cubbies. Noa did the same.

>Okami started leading them to the dining room. "After dinner, I'll show
you two to your rooms, where you can catch up on what I expect is some

>much-needed sleep. Business can wait until tomorrow- there's no need to
rush. I know that you've been given several days to discuss the matter of

>these stolen documents with me, which is much more time than we'll need."

>Asuma wasn't sure how to answer. His father wasn't acting anything like
how he was used to him acting- this was incredibly strange.

>
"Here we are," Mr. Shinohara announced upon arriving at the dinner table.

>"Asuma, you sit here. Ms. Izumi, you might as well sit here. I'll go
check with Tsukai to see how dinner is coming along and to make certain

>your bags get taken to the rooms." With that, he left.

>Noa turned to look at Asuma as they took their seats next to each other.
"He certainly doesn't seem to be as bad as you make him out to be."

>
Asuma nodded. "He's never acted this way to me, before. He's probably
>trying to impress you." He paused. "I forgot to say that you should be
careful what you say here- Dad sometimes bugged random rooms to find out
>what I or my brother were talking about when he wasn't around."

>Noa raised an eyebrow in disbelief, but didn't say anything. A few moments
later, Okami returned with Tsukai and a number of other servants who were
>carrying trays full of food and drink.

>"Well, it looks like dinner's ready," he announced in his most gracious
voice. "I believe it is time for us to eat."
>
* * * * *

>
The meal itself was a rather peaceful affair. Mr. Shinohara avoided
>talking to his son and instead concentrated on playing the gracious host
with Noa- not really talking about anything important, but discussion
>little things like the dinner they were having, the weather, and various
things like that.
>
Despite the seeming innocence of all this, Asuma noticed something about
>his father's behavior. While Okami was encouraging everyone to drink, he
himself was leaving the wine alone. Asuma, not certain what his father was
>planning, decided that under no circumstances would he get drunk that
night.
>
Noa, herself, didn't notice that anything was wrong at all. She was
>enjoying the meal, and while she preferred sake to the western wines that
Tsukai kept filling her glass with, she drank like you would expect the
>daughter of a liquor store owner to drink- like a fish. She was long
passed tipsy by the time she'd finished the main course, and she was
>downright drunk when she'd gotten through dessert- not that she realized
it.
>
Tsukai and the other servants gathered the dirty dishes and disappeared
>with a nod to Okami. Standing up, the elder Shinohara said, "Well, why
don't I show you two to your rooms."
>
Noa tried to get up and follow him, but the wine quickly made its presence
>felt, and she nearly collapsed onto the table. Asuma, who had no such
problems, quickly caught her before she fell.

>
"Thanksh, Ash'ma. How'd that 'appen?" she giggled.
>
Okami looked suitably embarassed for her. "Oh, dear.... Asuma, would you
>kindly help her?"

>Asuma glared at his father- he was fairly certain that the older man had
been trying to get them drunk, but Noa DID need to be helped to somewhere
>where she could lie down, and so there was little he could say about it.
"Of course I will." Putting her arm over his shoulders and slipping his
>arm under her arms, he helped Noa to stand up and supported her as they
walked after his father.
>
"I'm putting you two in the adjoining guest rooms- that way, if

you two
>want to talk about anything over the night, you won't have far to go."

>Asuma knew better than to talk about anything important in his father's
house, but there was something about where he was being placed that
>disturbed him. "A guest room? You're putting me in a guest room?"

>Okami nodded. "Sorry, son, but I'm afraid there really isn't a choice.
The part of the house your room is in is being remodeled, so I can't put
>you in there. Besides...."

>"Besides?"

>Mr. Shinohara coughed. "Er, nothing...."

>Asuma growled. He knew his father was hiding his real reason for putting
him up in the guest room, but he also knew that it was hopeless to try and
>get it out of the older man.

>"Anyway," Okami said. "Here we are. I assume you can help her into bed on
your own?"
>
"Er...." That threw Asuma for a loop. He looked over at the drunken Noa,
>but she was too out of it to understand what was going on. He looked back
at his father, who had already started on his way down the hall. "Right,"
>he muttered to himself.

>Struggling to continue supporting Noa, he opened the door to the closest
room and half-carried, half-dragged her inside. Setting her giggling form
>down on the bed, he began searching the room. He found a few pieces of
luggage in the closet which, thankfully, were Noa's and not his- he'd taken
>her to the right room.

>Asuma walked over to Noa on the bed. "Do you think you can get yourself
ready for bed?"
>
"Yep. Yep- I think so, yep." Noa said, nodding enthusiastically before
>passing out.

>Asuma sighed, looking her over. "Great, now what do I do?" Blushing, he
considered changing her into her pajamas himself, but decided that she
>probably wouldn't like it if he did that. Instead, he just slipped her
under the covers and made certain that she was lying in a comfortable
>position. Then, just like he had every night when she was off duty, he
gave her a quick peck on the forehead to say goodnight.

>
* * * * *

>
Watching with surveillance cameras from another room, Okami Shinohara
>raised an eyebrow. "Hmm. Yes, he definitely needs me to help get them
together."
>
Tsukai, sitting with him, cleared his throat. "Are you sure that's a good
>idea, sir? You know that he has an inordinate amount of distrust in you
and your motives."
>
"He's still just an ungrateful kid," Okami argued. "He doesn't know what's
>best for him, and I doubt he ever will. But it's obvious he likes this
girl- he surely won't mind if we get them together. And they

don't really
>need to know I'm doing it."

>Tsukai shifted uncomfortably. "What about the girl, sir?"

>"Eh?"

>"What if the girl doesn't like Asuma, sir? She isn't your daughter-
you
really don't have the right to interfere with how she acts."

>
"I'm the head of one of the largest industrial companies in all
of Japan,
>if not the world! I could BUY that girl if I so chose. I-"

>"You are forgetting that we live in a society where people cannot be
bought
and sold, sir," Tsukai admonished. "And you are forgetting
that emotions
>don't take kindly to being forced. You might have an easier time of
it if
you find out how she feels about him, first."
>
Mr. Shinohara glared up at his servant. "You know, you're the
only person
>on this planet who could get away with speaking in that tone to
me."

>Tsukai nodded. "And sometimes you need me to say things in that
tone, sir,
to prevent you from acting stupidly."
>
Okami nodded. "Sometimes." Looking back at the monitors, where
Noa slept
>peacefully and Asuma started getting ready for bed in his own room,
he
sighed. "Okay, we'll do it your way. Tomorrow, I'll try and
talk to Ms.
>Izumi during breakfast, and find out how she feels. But as long as
she
doesn't hate him, I'm going to put the two of them together. I
could see
>how my son feels for her- and you told me you found The Scarf in
her
luggage, so I know he gave it to her. If a member of my family
gets that
>devoted to a girl, I'll make certain that he gets her. It's for
their own
good."
>
Tsukai's face remained impassive, though there was a flicker of
some
>unidentifiable emotion in his eyes as he remembered Mr. Shinohara
ignoring
his advice one time before- a time which resulted in the
suicide of Asuma's
>brother. At least he wasn't completely ignoring it this time, but
unless
this Noa girl actually liked the younger Shinohara, this
was likely to be a
>rather nasty few days.

>* * * * *

>March 1, 2000

>It was pretty early in the morning when Noa found that someone was
trying
to shake her awake. It wasn't a very pleasant sensation...
she had a mild
>headache- no, make that a hangover- and her stomach wasn't feeling
at its
best, either. There was only one person who would be rude
enough to wake
>her up when she was feeling like this, and she was ready to make
that
person regret the day that they were born.
>
"Go away and let me sleep in, Asuma" she grumped, promising
herself that
>she'd get that revenge when she was actually able to get up.

>Tsukai coughed. "I am terribly sorry about awakening you, but I am

not my
employer's son. Instead, I am here to awaken you and prepare you for the
>day- Mr. Shinohara believed that you might need my special hangover cure
before breakfast."
>
Noa's stomach churned at the thought of food. "Ugh... okay, okay. Let me
>change first, though," she said, not even opening her eyes.

>Tsukai nodded. "Very good, Ma'am. I'll be waiting outside to take you to
the tea room. You'll find your luggage in the closet, and the lavatory is
>on your right." He slipped out of the room and closed the door with a
slight click.
>
Blearily, Noa sat up, using the caution gained from hangovers past to keep
>herself from getting too noxious. Opening her eyes for the first time, she
noticed that, despite being under the covers, she'd slept in her clothes.
>Carefully surveying her surroundings, she noticed that the room she was in
had a closet, a bed, a nightstand, and three doors. Otherwise, it was
>incredibly sparse.

>Thinking carefully, she started remembering the previous night. "Oh, yeah-
I'm being put up in one of the guest rooms. Poor Asuma, having to carry me
>all the way up here... and then I passed out after I told him I could get
myself ready for bed." Walking over to the closet, she began going through
>her luggage. "I wonder if he thought about putting me in my pajamas
himself." she giggled... and immediately regret it, as it caused her
>splitting headache to almost double. Recovering, she completed her
thought. "I wonder what I would have done to him if he had."

>
Pulling out a fresh set of clothes, she disappeared into the bathroom.
>Emerging a couple minutes later, feeling a little better though still
undergoing the effects of the previous night's alcohol, she walked to the
>center of the room. "Now... which door is the one into the hallway?"

>Deciding to go by trial and error, she opened the door on the left.

Stepping out, she quickly realized she had made a mistake- though not a bad
>one, by any means. In fact, she almost thought of it as a happy mistake,
because she was able to see Asuma sleeping.
>
While he'd seen her sleeping a number of times, it was really the first
>time she'd had a chance to watch him... well, to watch him sleeping in a
bed or some other item MEANT for sleeping on. During that stake-out,
>neither one of them had succeeded in falling asleep. In the hotel room for
the engineering convention, he'd always fallen asleep last and woken up
>first. In the hospital, whenever she opened her eyes he was in the chair
next to her- asleep or not. And any other time she might have had a chance
>to catch him, well, usually he wasn't in a bed.

>Greatly daring, she walked over to him and brushed the hair out of his eyes
with her fingertips. Then, mimicking his actions in the

hospital (and,
>unknown to her, the previous night), she bent down and lightly
touched her
lips to his forehead. Then, blushing slightly, she
rushed back to her
>room, closing the door between them as quickly and as quietly as she
could,
ignoring the hangover. Exiting out of the correct door, she
nodded to
>Tsukai. "Come on, let's try this hangover cure you say you
have."

>* * * * *

>As Noa sipped the bitter tea that Tsukai had prepared for her,
Okami
Shinohara walked into the room. Noticing her sitting at a
small table, he
>walked towards her and bowed formally.

>"Hello, Ms. Izumi. I'm glad to see you looking so well...
especially
considering how bad my servant said you looked this
morning. My apologies-
>I should have warned you about the potency of the wine we were
serving."

>Noa waved him off. "It's all right. This tea your servant gave me
is
nothing short of miraculous when it comes to eliminating a
hangover. Worst
>tasting stuff I've ever drunk, though."

>Okami smirked. He'd been given that same brew a few times in the
past, and
he knew exactly how bad it was. "It is rather sour,
isn't it?" Taking a
>seat in the chair across from her, he continued, "It looks as though
Asuma
is going to be sleeping in today. That son of mine is so
lazy...."
>
Noa raised an eyebrow. "Usually, he wakes up before I do. He was
probably
>even more tired than usual, last night, having been up since early
in the
morning, and having driven around for almost eight hours
yesterday."
>
Okami raised an eyebrow. "Eight hours?"
>
Noa nodded. "He picked me up at the hospital, and drove two
hours to take
>me to base... then it was a six hour trip from headquarters to here.
Come
to think of it, he was probably driving more than eight
hours, since he had
>to drive TO the hospital to pick me up."

>Mr. Shinohara blinked. "You were in the hospital?"

>Noa nodded. "I was injured and had to have surgery- my colon was
punctured
and needed to be repaired. It wasn't even in the line of
duty, just a
>silly softball game that was being taken too seriously." Pausing for
a
moment, she thought to put in a word for Asuma while she was at
it. "Your
>son was the one who rushed me to the hospital, and he stayed with me
during
the surgery."
>
Okami nodded. 'I wasn't aware you'd done that, Asuma,' he
thought to
>himself. 'You really seem to care about this girl, and you won't
do
anything to win her? Boy, you obviously don't know to look out
for
>yourself or you'd be married to her by now... you'd better be
thanking me
for what I'm trying to do for you.'
>
Smiling at the girl, he said, "That was nice of him. I wonder...
you
>probably know him better than I do, now- you've been working with

him for
almost a year- what are your impressions of Asuma?"

>
Noa blinked- she wasn't entirely certain how to answer that one. This was

>Asuma's FATHER- it wasn't one of her superiors in the police department who
would get them fired for their relationship, it was a close relative who

>had a right to know something about his son's love life. Maybe it would be
safe to tell him about said relationship- and she was dying to tell

>someone- ANYONE about their relationship.

>Then again, this was ASUMA'S father. Who was THE Shinohara from Shinohara
Heavy Industries. Who created the two things she most loved in the world-

>Asuma and Alphonse. Who might not like it if the simple daughter of a
liquor store owner from Hokkaido was dating his son. Asuma still had never

>given her a satisfactory answer as to why he'd never made a move on her
before she confronted him that day- perhaps it was because he feared his

>father's disapproval.

>No, wait- Asuma wanted to defy his father, not seek his approval.

>Well, if her boyfriend wanted to defy his father, maybe there was something
she could do to help him- and that would be to break the news that they

>were dating.

>"My impressions? He's a bit bossy at times, he's a bit of a jerk at times,
and he's a bit insensitive at times, but... but he's never steered me

>wrong, he's mostly bossy for fun, he always comes through in a pinch, and
he accepts my odd little quirks." She looked Okami straight in the eyes.

>"I think that's why I asked him if we could start dating."

>That stopped the elder Shinohara in his tracks. "You... what?"

>"Asuma and I've been dating for about two month now... well, actually,
we've been dating almost since we met, we just didn't realize that was what

>we were doing until a couple months ago."

>"That... would that happen to have been the same day he visited me last
time?"

>
Noa nodded. "Yeah... he told me about your conversation. But only after I

>confronted him about our relationship."

>Okami nodded. "So he told you about his concern with your affection for
your labor?"

>
Noa paused and didn't say anything for a moment. "What?" she asked coldly.

>
Okami cringed back, the ice in her voice intimidating even him. "He...

>said that you seemed to care more about that labor of yours than anything
else, and that he feared your obsession with this... Alphonse... would make

>any relationship impossible."

>"He... did?" she asked. Okami nodded. "Excuse me... I have to go
somewhere right now. I think I need some fresh air."

>
Standing up slowly, Noa left the room in a daze.

>
'Hmm,' Okami thought to himself. 'I think I made a mistake...'

>
* * * * *

>
Asuma walked into the tea room, and spotted his father, looking a little

>distressed. "Hey, dad- have you seen Noa anywhere? She wasn't in her room
when I went to wake her up."

>
The elder Shinohara hesitated. "Um... I think she said she was going to

>try and find some fresh air."

>Asuma sighed. "Well, I guess she doesn't have to be here for this... let's
get started with this interview."

>
Okami acted as if he hadn't even heard his son. "Asuma... why didn't you

>tell me that the two of you had started going out?"

>Asuma coughed. "It isn't any of your business WHO I'm dating. How'd you
find out?"

>
"She told me."

>
"Oh, well- we were trying to keep it a secret, but... but you ARE my

>father. I guess it's all right for you to know. But we can talk about
this later- business first. Do you have any clue why those particular

>plans were stolen."

>Mr. Shinohara growled- he had something important to tell his son, and like
he usually did when he talked with his son he got angry. "Business?"

>Please- I can cover the business in a matter of seconds- I just pulled some
strings with the police commissioner to get you and Ms. Izumi here so I

>could see if I could help you out with getting something started with her."
Asuma's eyes widened in shock. "Why would people take those plans? I

>dunno- maybe because they include much of the advanced technology that we
include in all of our police and military grade labors. Who might do it?

>Any other company building labors or looking into building labors. Only
people I could think of which would have the resources for that would be

>Shaft Enterprises or one of their subsidiaries. Anything else you might
want to ask? No? Good. Now, back to that girl of yours; I think that

>I've accidentally gotten you in trouble with her when I-"

>"Wait a second!" Asuma cried, recovering. "You did WHAT? You mean this
whole thing is just you making one of your shady deals with the

>commissioner? Why?! Did you stage the whole attack, too?"

Suddenly,
something else his father said clicked. "And what the hell did you do to

>get me in trouble with Noa?"

>"I told her something you should have talked with her about months ago- I
told her about your concerns regarding that labor of hers."

>
Asuma blinked. "You told her WHAT? Dammit- why the hell did you say

>something about that?" Turning away, he said, "We'll be leaving by
lunchtime. If you ever want to see me again, you'd better hope I can patch

>things up with her."

>* * * * *
>Noa, sitting on a rock outside of the mansion, watched as Asuma

spotted her
>and ran up, waving.

>"Noa, there you are," he said breathlessly. "I've been looking all over

for you."

>"Why, hello Asuma," Noa said with forced calm. "You'll never guess what your father and I talked about not too long ago."

>'Oh, damn- she's pissed,' Asuma thought to himself.

>"See, you told your father something you should've told me a long time ago.

>And he told that thing to me."

>Asuma nodded. "Yes, I did. And I'm sorry."

>Noa glared at him. "Is that all you have to say- I'm SORRY?"

>"What more can I say? I was afraid that Alphonse was too important to you for you to let me into your life. It wasn't even something I was aware of

>consciously, until my father asked me why I wasn't making a move on you. But now I know you ARE able to care about me, and not just Alphonse. It

>wasn't an issue any more, and I was afraid you'd take it the wrong way. So I never brought it up."

>Noa raised an eyebrow disbelievingly. "Not an issue any more? Are you

>sure about that? Are you COMPLETELY certain that you aren't even the least bit jealous of Alphonse? Are you?"

>Asuma opened his mouth but clamped it shut before he said anything. He

>just couldn't bring himself to answer 'yes.'

>Noa sighed. "See? It's an issue still. You should have told me about it."

>Asuma sighed. "Well, what do you expect? You spend so much time and

>lavish so much attention on that labor, I STILL don't know if you care more about it or me. You've already said that he fills a part of your heart I

>don't- of COURSE I'm jealous! But I don't want you to get rid of Alphonse or anything- it's part of who you are. Just like you accepted me being a

>jerk to you sometimes, I accepted having to be jealous over a labor. So what is talking to you about it going to do?"

>Noa tensed, gathering herself. "Maybe talking to me is going to reassure

>you. Asuma... if we ever... if we ever get to the point where we get married and have kids, will you react the same way if I lavish attention on

>them instead of you, the same way I do with Alphonse?"

>Asuma shook his head. "No, but we aren't married."

>"And Alphonse isn't a kid- he's a labor. At most, he's a pet. I love him, but there's no way I could care more about him than I could care for a

>person. If I had to choose between Alphonse and you, believe me- I'll choose you."

>Asuma took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and then slowly let it out.

>Re-opening his eyes, a slight smile appeared on his face. "Hmm... is this our first official fight?"

>Noa blinked. "I think so...."

>Asuma's smile widened slightly. "You won. Don't get used to it,

though-
 >you can bet I'll win the next one."

 >"What do you mean I won?"

 >"Noa... I think, for the first time, I really know that you like me
 more
than Alphonse. Thank you." Pulling her into his arms, he
 tenderly kissed
 >her forehead. "Now, according to everything I know about fighting
 with
girlfriends, the best part is making up. So whadya say to
 leaving this
 >place and having a night out on the town? My treat?"

 >Noa blinked. "But our job-"

 >"Is taken care of. Come on- pack your bags. We're leaving. We've
 don't
need to be back at headquarters for several days- we've got
 plenty of time
 >for a date. That's an order, from backup to forward!"

 >"Yes, sir!" she said, saluting with a smile.

 >* * * * *

 >Viewing the scene outside from another of his hidden cameras,
 Tsukai
smiled. "See, sir? Talking to her DID help."
 >
"Help? I damn near ruined it!" Okami said.
 >
"Yes, but only because you brought something out into the open
 that would
 >have festered and weakened their relationship if nothing had been
 done
about it," Tsukai noted. "Asuma won't appreciate it, but you
 did a good
 >job today, sir."

 >"Asuma wouldn't have appreciated it, anyway," Okami noted gruffly.
 "But
thank you, Tsukai."
 >
Watching Asuma put his arm around Noa and lead her off on the
 monitor,
 >Tsukai smiled. "It was worth it, sir."

>Next Episode: Shinohara's Ex-girlfriend from high school, Kashima,
 shows
up after he gets a little nervous and cuts things off rather
 abruptly when
 >he and Noa are getting a little romantic. Why is he so nervous, and
 why
did she decide to show up now?

>

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15. Episode 15: Haunted Love

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert
 legal junk here...

>
Episode 15: Haunted Love

>March 1, 2000

>Noa put her last bag into the trunk of Asuma's car. It seemed odd to
 her
that only two hours before she had been angry with him,
 learning from his

>father over breakfast that he was jealous of Alphonse.

>It was still morning. They'd finished breakfast shortly after their

little
>fight (avoiding Mr. Shinohara in the process) before
packing up their
>belongings, and were finally about to leave. It was then that Noa
thought
>to ask what they were going to do.
>
Asuma shrugged in response to her question. "Well, when we got
the
>assignment I was thinking that we'd probably finish early, so I
figured we
>might want go to a nearby bar and get drunk- I was
pretty sure I'd need it.
>I've changed my mind about that, though." With that, he ducked into
the
>driver's seat.
>
Noa smiled, getting into the car. "Good. I'm not sure I like you
drunk."
>
Asuma blinked, looking over at her as he buckled the seatbelt.
"You
>don't?"

>"LAST time you got drunk around me, you asked me if you could pick
on me!"

>Asuma smirked, starting the car. "I don't see what the problem is.
It
seems to me that I'm MORE polite when I'm drunk."

>
"Whadya mean by that?" Noa asked.
>
"If I hadn't been drunk, I probably wouldn't have asked."

>
"Why, you!" Noa growled playfully.
>
Asuma pulled the car out onto the highway before continuing.
"Anyway,
>since getting drunk doesn't seem to be a good plan anymore, I
figured we
>might want to drive around town and see what's open. We
don't have to be
>back at headquarters any time soon, but if we head towards it as we
go we
>might be able to cut a few hours off of the trip. At any
rate, we'll have
>dinner and a movie tonight before heading back, but I don't really
know
>what we CAN do between now and then."
>
They drove on in a comfortable silence for a few minutes, the
car radio on
>in the background, before leaving the suburban area in which the
Shinohara
>mansion resided and arriving in the outskirts of
downtown Tokyo. Noa,
>looking out the window, spied the listings for what was playing in a
movie
>theater, and started idly talking about the lack of any
recent good mecha
>movies.

>The pleasant conversation that followed lasted until Noa spotted
something
>else that caught her attention- a fair.
>
"Oh, Asuma, look! Why don't we spend the day there? There's
bound to be
>plenty of things to do!"

>Asuma thought that they were a little old for that sort of thing,
but since
>he couldn't think of anything better to do he agreed and
parked the car.
>In the end, he had to agree that they weren't too old for it, after
all,
since he found himself having a lot of fun. He tried to win a
few prizes
>for Noa- first he tried to catch some koi, but he couldn't keep the
catcher
>intact, and then he tried racing to fill balloon up to
bursting with a
>water gun, but his aim was terrible. In the end, though, he only was
able
>to get her a really small stuffed bear. She didn't seem to

mind, giving it
>a great big hug and giving HIM a peck on the cheek for winning it for her.

>Despite Noa's best efforts, they hadn't filled up on cotton candy by the
time dinner rolled around. Instead of going out to a restaurant, though,
>they headed over to one of the food vendors and stayed for the fireworks
show at the end of the day.
>
The fireworks were fantastic, lighting up the sky with hundreds of red,
>blue, green, yellow, and white stars which shined off of their features
around them. Asuma smiled, turning to look at Noa. She was already
>staring intently at him, and he could see the fireworks reflected in her
eyes.
>
Asuma read the emotion in those eyes, and swallowed hard. For the first
>time, it struck him- this girl didn't just like him, wasn't just satisfied
with their casual dates and occasional mild intimacies. She wanted more,
>he could see. For the first time, Asuma realized that Noa was really in
love with him.
>
The fireworks ended. Noa continued to stare up into his eyes, even as the
>people around them started milling about to leave. "Asuma," she began.

>She was going to tell him- to end all doubt of her feelings. And she was
going to do it then.
>
The thought terrified him. 'Oh, god... I'm not ready for this,' he thought
>frantically. 'I never really thought it'd go this far... did I? Oh, no...
but I can't... I'm not ready!'
>
Coughing, he turned away. "Come on- it's too late to go to the movies. We
>need to head back to headquarters before it gets too late."

>He glanced back at her before moving. Noa still watched him, but her
expression looked somewhat hurt. As if she knew WHY he wasn't letting her
>tell him. "Asuma?" she asked plaintively.

>"We have to go, Noa," he said. "Sorry."

>That apology was for more than just having to leave, and he knew that Noa
understood that. It didn't stop her from still being hurt, however.
>
Putting up a brave front, she regained some of her cheer. "All right. But
>we'll have to do this again someday. All right?"

>She was also asking for more than just the chance to come back one day.
Asuma understood this, and sighed. "Maybe. We'll see."

>
* * * * *
>
The silence of the trip back to SV2 headquarters was worse than it had been
>on the trip to the Shinohara mansion.

>Noa was unhappy. She still had no clue what had happened. It had been a
very good day up until she fireworks show- even the early morning fight had
>been a plus in the end. Things were fine when they left the mansion-
they'd chatted pleasantly, and Noa certainly hadn't sensed anything wrong

>then.

>Then the fair- what had happened there? They'd had a lot of fun- he'd even
won a teddy bear for her. Sure, it wasn't the largest teddy in the world,
>but then he wasn't really very good at the types of games the fair had- it
had taken a lot of tries just to get that for her.

>
Then the fireworks show. The explosions of color that darted the sky

>highlighted his features, and he'd never looked more handsome in her eyes.
It was the perfect moment, the perfect mood, the perfect time.

>
Noa realized then that she didn't just 'like' him- it was more, much more.

>It was something she'd never felt for ANYONE before.

>And for a brief instant, she thought she saw the same thing in his eyes.

>Then it disappeared into an expression of absolute terror. That terror was
quickly followed by a cancellation of their plans, and then they left. And

>Noa STILL couldn't figure out what happened.

>For his part, Asuma wasn't entirely sure what to do about it all. He liked
Noa- he really did. But love? That was... something different. That

>entailed obligations he wasn't ready for.

>That was too much like what happened with Yukie.

>Yukie Kashima- the girl he hadn't thought of since, well, since his high
school reunion, really. The first person he'd come to care about after the

>dead of his brother. He hadn't seen since he'd graduated.

>Or had he? He was still never certain of that. He could have sworn he'd
met her during that reunion. According to his classmates, however, she was

>probably in... where was it again? Hokkaido? At any rate, she was
supposedly too ill to attend. And when he had gone back to that art

>gallery, he never found her signature in the guest book. Had she been
there, or not? Had HE even been there?

>
Come to think of it, Noa was the one who pulled him out of the funk when

>Yukie left again. Or when the dream of Yukie left, whichever it was. He'd
been standing out in the snow, trying to figure out what next to try to

>find her, and along came Noa. And so he gave up looking for Yukie to hang
out with Noa.

>
But still, Yukie was his first love. Very much his first love. She was

>also his first kiss (a very shy first kiss, at that- he hadn't even said a
word to her by then, she just noticed a sad, shy boy in the corner at a

>party, walked over to him, and gave him a sweet little kiss), and at one
point he thought she'd one day be his first, er, partner (odd that he'd

>choose that word to think of it, considering he'd ALWAYS thought of Noa as
a partner- though maybe not in that way). But then she disappeared- she'd

>moved away, without saying good-bye, without leaving a phone number,
without leaving a forwarding address, without... anything.

>
And perhaps that was what Asuma was afraid of. That if Noa loved

him, he'd
>be obliged to return that love. And everyone he'd loved- his
brother, his
mother, and Yukie- left him. His brother committed
suicide, his mother...
>well, he didn't want to get into that. And Yukie just
disappeared.

>'Damn,' he thought to himself. 'I never should have let this thing
with
Noa get to this point. What do I do? How do I NOT lose her?
If I don't
>love her back, I'll lose her... and if I do love her, she'll leave.
Gods,
how did I get into this mess?'
>
It was thoughts like these, and others, that plagued the young
couple for
>the entire trip back to what was, for them, home.

>* * * * *

>Noa and Asuma reached Gotoh's office just minutes before Unit 2's
duty
session was over. He was rather surprised to see them.

>
"You two are back early," he said, surprised. "I wasn't
expecting you for
>another two days."

>Asuma coughed. "Yes, sir. We finished early."

>Gotoh nodded. "Well, the shift's practically over... but I expect to
have
your report in the morning. See you tomorrow. Dismissed."

>
Asuma nodded, and left the room. Noa followed.
>
"Asuma..." she began, concerned.
>
He shook his head. "Why don't you just go to bed, Noa? I'll take
care of
>the report... I won't be able to sleep tonight, anyway. Got too much
on my
mind."
>
Noa searched for something she could say to reassure him,
anything that
>would help him through... whatever it was that was making him so
distant.
"I..."
>
"Please, Noa?" he begged.
>
"Okay," she said, reaching out and squeezing one of his hands.
It was a
>bold move, considering they were practically out in the open in
SV2
headquarters, but it was something she just needed to do. "But
if you need
>me, just get me, okay? I probably won't be able to sleep much,
either."

>Asuma sighed, watching her leave. She'd been trying to reassure him,
but
all she did was make it more difficult. He was more sure than
ever of her
>feelings, and it was starting to hurt not being able to risk
returning
them. Oh, well- there wasn't anything he could do about
it just then.
>Maybe if he got his mind off of his romantic problems and set it
to
stretching the five sentences of information he got from his
father into a
>ten page report, he'd be clearer the next day when he tried to come
up with
a solution. At any rate, just standing there and looking
wistfully at the
>doorway she'd just gone through wasn't helping.

>* * * * *

>Asuma leaned back in the chair and sighed. He'd finished the
report,
working manically from the moment he sat down, but he
still hadn't cleared

>his mind of his problems with Noa. He still didn't know what to do.

>"Just tell her," a female voice said from behind him.

>Asuma's eyes widened. Spinning around, he found that Yukie Kashima was
actually standing before him, smiling sadly.

>
"How did you get in here?" he asked, shocked.

>
"I was needed here," she answered simply. "You're making a big mistake.

>You need to tell her."

>"Tell who? What are you talking about?"

>"Noa, silly."

>"How do you know about Noa?" he wondered. "I never told you anything about
her... I'm not even sure I've seen you since I've met her."

>
Yukie laughed. "You've seen me since you met her... surely you haven't

>forgotten our class reunion, or the trip to the art gallery?"

>Asuma paused. Last time he thought he was talking to her, he was mistaken.
Well, maybe- he still wasn't sure. "Did that really happen?" he asked.

>
"Sort of," the girl answered mysteriously. "It's a long story. But I do

>know about Noa. I know a lot about you. Some of the things I know about
you I doubt you even know... or realize, at least."

>
Asuma frowned. "Oh? Like what?"

>
Yukie just smiled and shook her head. "Come on- let's go for a walk.

>You're done here."

>"Uh... okay," he said, getting up and following her.

>She made her way out of the building, walking over to the edge of the
fishing pier before saying anything else. "Asuma... what happened between

>the two of you? Why did you make her so upset?"

>"Huh? Who?"

>Yukie bopped him lightly on the forehead. "Noa, silly. I'm here to talk
to you about her."

>
Asuma frowned. "How do you know about her? I KNOW I never told you about

>her?"

>Yukie sighed. "If you were willing to know, I'm pretty sure you would.
Now, quit avoiding the question- why'd you make her so upset?"

>
Asuma sighed himself, sitting down at the pier and dangling his legs over

>the edge. "I'm not really sure how to answer that. I guess part of it
was... well, you."

>
Yukie smiled slightly, smoothing out her skirt and jacket and sitting down

>next to him. "I know. That's part of why I'm here... but what I meant
was, why do you think what you did made her so upset?"

>
Asuma shifted uncomfortably. "Well, I think it's pretty obvious that she

>loves me. I suspect she's upset because I can't return that love."

>"Can't? Why not?"

>"Seems pretty obvious to me. If I do, she'll disappear."

>"That seems like a pretty silly reason to me- why would she disappear if
you loved her?" Yukie said. "But suppose it's true- shouldn't you tell her
>about it? Doesn't she deserve to know WHY you can't love her?"

>Asuma nodded. "She does... but she wouldn't understand, and I don't know
how to make her understand. That's why I haven't told her."

>
"Hmm... so why didn't this ever come up before? You've been dating her for
>months, now- surely you must have realized that it would eventually lead to
some pretty deep feelings."
>
Asuma sighed, kicking his legs against the pier. "I never really thought
>about it. It wasn't really my idea to go out at all- it was Noa's. I just
didn't want to lose what I already had with her."

>
"Well, you're going to lose something now. The comfort factor between you
>two is gone- she feels rejected, and you can't even explain to her why.
What IS this nonsense about you losing her if you love her, anyway?"
>
"I always lose the people I love. I loved my mother, and she left us. I
>loved my brother, and he killed himself. I loved you, and you disappeared
without even saying good-bye." He shrugged. "Maybe I'm just being
>paranoid, but I don't want to risk losing Noa because I love her."

>Yukie looked over at him. "You are just being paranoid... AND you've
misdiagnosed the problem. It was never because you loved them that they
>left, but because they feared the people they loved didn't love them. Your
mother feared that your father didn't love her, and so she ran off. Your
>brother thought that meant she didn't love him, and without her presence to
stabilize the hatred he felt for his father, there was nothing to hold him
>back from his ultimate act of defiance. And I... well, if I'd known you
loved me before... well, I might have been able to stay. I don't know."
>She looked up at him. "At any rate, it wasn't your love that made them
leave. It was their fear that they were unloved. And right now, Noa is
>VERY afraid you don't love her."

>Asuma's eyes widened. "But... I don't. Not yet, anyway- I may one day,
but I don't yet. That was another reason why I wasn't able to let her tell
>me, yet...."

>"Don't you?"

>"I... I still love you, Yukie. I like Noa, but... sometimes, it seems like
I'm worried you'd get jealous of us, and so..."

>
Yukie laughed sadly. "Asuma... you need to realize you can love both her
>and me. I don't mind. I really don't."

>"Yukie... I don't want to settle for Noa if there's still a chance I could
have you. Is there?"
>
Yukie sighed. "I just can't do it... it violates the rules, but I can't

>keep it up any longer." She reached out and touched his chest... only she
didn't touch it, but instead, her hand went through it. "Asuma, I'm dead.
>I went to Hokkaido to go to the hospital. I died only a few months after
high school."
>
Asuma's eyes widened as he focused on her arm protruding from his chest.
>"What?!"

>"I was sent her to help you out.... Asuma, I can tell you something right
now. I'm supposed to just let you figure this out, but I'm already
>breaking the rules by letting you know I'm a ghost." She focused on his
eyes. "Asuma... you do love Noa. More than you ever loved me. The simple
>fact that you're so afraid of losing her should tell you that." She
laughed slightly. "You're right, though- I am a little
jealous. I was in
>love with you in high school, but didn't know how you felt about me. I
feel what you and Noa have, and WISH it was what I had with you. But it
>isn't... and all I can do is make certain you don't lose it." She bent
over and kissed his cheek. "Good-bye, Asuma. I have to go now. I'm
>afraid we'll never see each other again, but that's all right."

>She faded from sight, leaving him staring where she had been.

>* * * * *

>Noa woke up. Somehow, she'd dozed off to sleep- she had no idea how, but
she had. Something was tugging on her now, though- it almost felt like she
>was being pushed out of bed.

>She hadn't even changed into her pajamas that night- the second night in a
row she hadn't, come to think of it. She was hoping, though, that Asuma
>would show up to talk. Now, though, she felt like she was being pulled by
some spectral hand to find him.
>
She wanted to check his dorm room, but something told her that he wouldn't
>be there. She moved on, eventually stepping outside. There he was,
sitting on the fishing pier skipping stones across Tokyo Bay. Cautiously,
>she walked out to him.

>"Asuma?" she asked.

>He jumped, nearly falling into the water. "Noa!" he cried, desperately
trying to keep his balance.
>
Noa grabbed an arm and pulled in an attempt to help him, but it was too
>late. Downwards he plunged, pulling her along with her.

>*splash* "Gack!" Noa sputtered, trying to keep from drowning.

>"What were you trying to do, Noa? Give me a heart attack!?" Asuma growled,
spitting out some water as they struggled out of the water.
>
"I'm sorry, Asuma... I'm sorry!"
>
As they struggled out of the water, the invisible ghost of Yukie Kashima
>sighed to herself. Oh, well- one opportunity for the two knuckleheads to
tell each other how they felt was gone, but they'd

have more. Many more.

>And she knew, deep in her soul, that they'd say it one day.

>If only she could have resisted the temptation to knock them into the bay,
though...

>-----
Next Episode: The Second Unit goes on its second annual joint vacation.

>Asuma has something he wants to tell Noa, but will the others get in his
way?

>

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16. Episode 16: Asuma vs. Noa: The Confron...

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
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>
Episode 16: Asuma vs. Noa- the Confrontation in the Hot Springs

>March 9, 2000

>"Another Unit vacation? So soon?" Takeo asked. All of unit two was
gathered in the captains' office to hear the announcement.

>
Gotoh nodded. "With the re-organization of the SV2, the commissioner

>decided to try and standardize the dates for the Annual Unit Vacations to
give each unit one three day weekend together. Even though our last one

>was was only four months ago, that was before the reorganization. They
asked each captain to name a weekend, and that would become the fixed date

>for future unit vacations. Since Noa is still not cleared to pilot a
labor, we're only at half-strength, and so I figured I'd sign us up for our

>vacation now."

>"So where are we going this time?" Asuma asked.

>"An onsen- the same one as last time." He paused. "But the vacation
doesn't start until tomorrow, people, and we've got things to do right now.

>Dismissed."

>Noa sought out Asuma as they left the office. Their little dip in the
Tokyo Bay helped to break through the tension that had built up, though

>perhaps in the back of both their minds were the events of that night at
the fireworks show. Still, they'd gone back to their tradition of finding

>a private place every night, and acting as the couple they were.

>Asuma hadn't been quite as comfortable as Noa, however. He'd had a
rather... unusual... experience before falling into the bay, and during it

>he'd learned a few things about himself. Some of those things he

wanted to
talk to Noa about, but whenever they were alone on those nights he couldn't
>bring it up. It just wasn't the right mood, or there wasn't enough time,
or he just didn't know HOW to bring it up.
>
At any rate, he wasn't going to let this inability keep him from enjoying
>himself.

>"You doing anything at the moment?" Noa asked him.

>Asuma shrugged. "Just got the usual duty shift busy work. Why?"
Their
nightly meeting wasn't scheduled until several hours later.

>
"Shige's going to be teaching me a bit on how to maintain Alphonse, like I
>asked him to a while back. I was wondering if you might want to join me."

>That was another thing that had happened that same day. He and Noa had
gotten into a fight, of sorts, because he hadn't told her he was jealous of
>Alphonse. Noa knew this, and ever since finding out she'd done everything
she could to reassure him she liked him more. However, she was ALSO trying
>to get him more involved in her interest in the labor, and this definitely
appeared to be one of those times.
>
'Oh, well... might as well go make sure she doesn't aggravate those
>injuries of hers... she really should be taking it easy, still. But I
guess that it's okay... I've been able to spend a lot of time with her
>because of them.'

>"Sure, why not?" he said. "Just let me make sure that I'm not really
needed for whatever useless assignment they're giving us today."
>
"Thanks. I'll see you there." She turned to go.
>
Asuma stopped her just before she left. "Say, Noa..."

>
"Yeah, Asuma?" she said, turning back around.
>
"I was thinking about asking you tonight, but now's just as good a time as
>any. There's an afternoon matinee concert by Kana on the eleventh which I
think we could get to rather easily from the onsen. I was wondering if you
>might want to go to it."

>There were a variety of reasons he was asking this. Kana's style of
singing wasn't his type of music (or Noa's, for all he knew), but she WAS
>sort of a friend to the both of them. Kana had been part of Unit 2 for a
little more than a week, studying how to pilot an Ingram as part of a
>promotional stunt she was doing, and during the period she'd gotten to know
the both of them pretty well. Especially Noa, who had been put in charge
>of teaching the young idol singer the basics of Labor usage.

>In fact, Noa had been the object of some affection by the singer- a very
unnerving thing for her. However, Kana gave up on Noa after seeing how she
>and Asuma felt for each other. In fact, looking back on it, both of them
considered her the first person to point out how deep their relationship
>was building to, claiming she couldn't compete with the depth of

feelings
Asuma had for Noa.

>
Since then, Kana had made certain they stayed in contact. It wasn't easy-

>the demands on the life of the two police officers was bad enough, but when
you added in the schedule that an idol singer was expected to maintain it

>should have been impossible. However, Kana was determined. At one point,
Asuma noted to himself that the singer had the same characteristic

>stubbornness with this that Noa sometimes showed when she got mad during
labor combat.

>
The contact WAS limited- they almost never saw each other- but Kana

>frequently called to chat with Noa on the phone, and she wrote to her
friends at the SV2 all of the time. In one of those letters, she'd

>informed them that she was going to put their names on her guest list at
every concert she performed in case they ever wanted to attend one. This

>would be their first chance to take her up on that offer.

>It was also the first time since the dip in Tokyo Bay that they were going
out. Something Noa was a little concerned about, considering how things

>had gone at the fair.

>"I... sure! I'd love to!" she said.

>Asuma nodded. "Good. We'll hammer out the details tonight, at meeting
spot three. Now, don't keep Shige waiting. I'll join you in a minute."

>With that, he ran off in the direction of the main office.

>Meeting spot three was one of their prearranged private locations. It was
also, since it was outside on the fishing pier (the same one which they

>fell off of a week beforehand), one of the few where they could be seen in
the open. Noa feared this meant that he was withdrawing from her, still- a

>great disappointment to her, as she had hoped his invitation to the concert
was a sign that he'd finally gotten over whatever it was that scared him

>off at the fair. However, there wasn't much she could do about it.

>Shinohara, glancing behind him, noticed that Noa still hadn't moved.

"Hey,
are you going to your lessons or not?"

>
"Huh?!" Noa said, startled out of her little reverie. "Ack! I'm gonna be

>late!"

>* * * * *

>March 10, 2000

>Noa stretched out slowly, stepping out of Asuma's car. They'd driven up to
the onsen seperately from the rest of the unit, though the sight of the

>chartered bus showed that they'd arrived after everyone else. Asuma had
been a little concerned at how not going with the rest of the group would

>look, but rationalized that there wasn't any other way to get to the
concert without bringing along his car and so it was worth the risk- they'd

>done similar things before without having gotten into trouble for it, after
all.

>
The concert wasn't until the next day, so they still had that

night to

>relax, soak in the hot springs, maybe get drunk, and just have fun with the
group in general. In the meantime, though, she wanted to work out those

>kinks in her back she'd gotten from the drive.

>Asuma looked on in concern. "Are you sure you're fully recovered from your
surgery? I've seen you trying to stretch out your back more these past few

>days than I ever have in the past...."

>Noa nodded. "I think so. I have been feeling a bit more stiff lately,
though- possibly because of the surgery, but even if it is I don't think

>it's anything to worry about. I think it's probably more due to all the
bed rest I had to take during that month recovering. Don't worry- I'll be

>all right. Besides, a soak in these hot springs will probably take care of
it, no problem."

>
Asuma wanted to say more, but he never had the chance.

>
Natsume Kawai ran out of the onsen's lobby, waving. "Hi, you two!" she

>chirped. "We've all been waiting! Come on! Let's not waste what time
we've got here! Hurry up, hurry up!

>
With that, the hyperactive girl grabbed hold of both of their hands and

>dragged them to where the rest of the second unit was waiting.

Shinohara
sighed as he was being pulled- there was something he wanted to talk to Noa

>about, but it didn't look like he'd be able to tell her then.

>* * * * *

>Noa sighed as she relaxed into the hot spring. The spots on her back where
she'd had to have stitches were a lot stiffer than she'd let on to Asuma,

>but this soak felt like just what she needed to complete her recovery.

>Takeo smirked at her as she entered the tub. "So, Noa... how's life been
for you? Haven't had much of a chance to speak woman-to-woman with you in

>a while."

>Noa raised an eyebrow. She wanted to relax, not to talk, but it would be
impolite to just ignore her. "Well, I was in the hospital for a month

>until about a week ago, so what do you think? My back's been killing me
off and on these last couple of days... this trip to these hot springs are

>just what I needed."

>"Yes, you've been in a hospital for a month, but you've certainly had
plenty of company. Asuma stayed with you that whole time, I believe...

>when I was shot, I wasn't visited nearly as much by anybody."

>Noa hesitated. She wasn't sure if she liked how this was going- of all the
others in the SV2, Takeo (and Ohta as well, though he usually confronted

>Shinohara instead) was the one who most hinted that she knew what was going
on between her and Asuma. That comment was another example of such.

>
Still, it wasn't really possible to deny that Asuma had been there the

>entire month- after all, he'd as much as admitted it when he took her back
to visit everyone on Valentine's Day. "Yeah, I did have company... I
>wouldn't necessarily call it pleasant company, though. I swear he spent
most of his time there just trying to figure out a way to annoy me." That
>was sort of true- though partly because Noa, in a fit of absolute boredom,
had challenged him to come up with the best way to bug her once she got up
>on her feet. He never came up with a good one, though- at least, not one
that he'd told her about.
>
Takeo smiled nostalgically. "I wish someone had bugged me during my time
>in the hospital. Especially if that someone was a cute guy like Asuma."

>Noa sank deeper into the water, glancing around shyly as she wished that
Natsume would get finish getting ready and join them in the spring in the
>hopes that Kumagami would end this line of questioning. "Takeo!"

>Takeo giggled quietly. "Sorry- I know that you like to think you're just
friends. I happen to know that what you say isn't true, just from how you
>two act when you're together, but cling to your delusions while you can.
Still, it doesn't hurt your friendship that he's cute, does it?"
>
"Um... no, it doesn't hurt," Noa admitted, blushing brightly. She paused,
>and thought frantically for a moment. After a few seconds of pondering,
she came to a decision. "Takeo... um, we aren't claiming that we're just
>friends any more. At least, not to each other..."

>Takeo stiffened, trying to keep from exploding into even greater laughter.
"Oh?"
>
"Please don't tell anyone!" Noa begged, misinterpreting her expression.
>"We don't want it to get too widely know... we don't want to be seperated
by some sort of internal affairs investigation and-"

>
"My lips are sealed," Kumagami said. "But it IS pretty obvious what's
>going on between you two."

>"Maybe," Noa agreed hesitantly. "But it isn't obvious enough that anyone
can prove anything, yet, and we're trying to keep it that way." Smiling at
>Takeo, she said, "It would be nice to have a confidant about all of this,
though."
>
Takeo nodded. "I'd be glad to be one," she said. "Now, tell me... how far
>have you gone with him?"

>"Um..." Noa blushed even deeper than she had been before. "Well... just
a little kissing. He's kinda distanced himself a bit since that trip to
>his fathers."

>"Oh? What happened?"

>Noa sighed. "I wish I knew. I mean, things were going perfectly... we'd
had a fight in the morning, but we resolved that and decided to go on a
>date around town to make up for it. We went to a carnival, and stayed most
of the day... there was a fireworks show, and I

glanced up at him, and...
>and suddenly, his face filled with fear and he cancelled the rest of our
plans, insisting that we had to hurry back."
>
Takeo looked amused. "Hmm... and, just out of curiosity, what do you
>think he saw when he was looking at you?"

>"Huh?"

>"Might it be possible that he saw some emotion in your face that scared
him?"
>
"Like what?"
>
"Oh, I don't know... maybe like love?"
>
Noa's eyes widened. "He warned me earlier that he was pushing himself...
>maybe he was afraid I was moving too quickly."

>"Maybe. Or maybe he's afraid of commitment. Lots of men disappear just
when you might be willing to spend the rest of your life with them,"
>Kumagami said wistfully.

>"Asuma won't run from me," Noa said with determination. "He won't do that.
He was just scared we were moving too fast, that's all."

>
Takeo sighed. "Ah... I envy the naivete of the young."

>
Noa tried to comment on that, but the door finally opened to present
>Natsume Kawai.

>"Hi, you two! What are we all talking about?" the new arrival asked,
quickly making her way into the pool.
>
Noa coughed. "Um... nothing important."
>
Takeo laughed, amused at Noa's antics. "No, it's just something every girl
>in Noa's situation goes through now and again."

>"Did I miss something?" Natsume asked, blinking.

>* * * * *

>On the men's side of the onsen, the conversation was a lot less personal.
In fact, there was a lot less conversation. Asuma, who before realizing he
>and Noa were a couple would have been plotting ways to sneak a peek of the
girls (not that he didn't want to sneak a peek at Noa, but he also wasn't
>willing to risk getting in trouble with her at the time), was sitting alone
in a corner of the hot spring, brooding. Joudo Ishikawa was just relaxing
>in the water, nearly sleeping. Gotoh had snuck out to call Shinobu.

Hiromi, perhaps, was the only one who MIGHT have wanted to talk, but there
>was no-one around to talk to.

>Asuma continued to plan what he was going to do at the concert while he
brooded. There were things he needed to talk to Noa about, and he wasn't
>sure how he was going to do it. He hoped the concert would provide the
right element to explain things to her, but he wasn't sure it would.
>
Hiromi was a little unnerved by the silence. Usually, even though he
>didn't make much noise himself, whenever the unit went to a hot spring or a
public bath, there was lots of noise. Shinshi and Ohta would be fighting
>with each other while Asuma would be conspiring to peek on the girls, or
there would be a terrorist who they needed to

investigate, or the bath
>would be died the color of blood by a 'leaky' paint cartridge. It
was
never that quiet.
>
Besides, Asuma looked a little upset. As he'd once done for Noa,
Hiromi
>decided to see if he could talk his partner through his
problems.

>Wading over to Shinohara's corner of the spring, he asked, "Asuma,
can I
talk to you for a minute?"
>
Asuma looked up, a bit startled. Hiromi, wanting to talk? "Um,
sure...
>what about?"

>"You looked kind of down. Noa hasn't exactly been herself the past
week or
so, either. Did something happen between the two of you?"

>
Asuma sighed. "Well... yeah, maybe. I did something stupid, but
we're
>working it out. No big deal."

>Hiromi nodded. "Okay. But I think I should tell you I know what's
going
on. Don't mistreat Noa, and I won't have any complaints with
you. If she
>doesn't mistreat you, I won't complain to her, either. But I'll have
my
eyes opened. And right now, it seems to me you're at fault for
whatever it
>is upsetting her."

>Asuma blinked, staring across the hot spring to make certain that
Joudo was
still asleep.. "You... know?"
>
Hiromi nodded. "It would take a blind man to miss it. Besides,
you might
>not think of it very often, but I'm with you two more of the time
than
anyone else. You tend to let what little guard you have down
when I'm
>around."

>Asuma bit his lip. "Um... you know that if our superiors find out
about
Noa and me, we'll get in a lot of trouble..."
>
Hiromi nodded. "As long as they can't prove anything, though,
you're safe.
> Don't be afraid to show her how you feel, just as long as you keep
the
public displays of affection to a minimum."
>
"Um... right. That's partly why-" Asuma stopped when Joudo
issued a loud
>yawn, indicating he was waking up. "Um, let's talk later."

>Hiromi nodded, heading back to his side of the pool. "Just treat
her
right, Asuma. She loves you, after all," he whispered.

>
Asuma stiffened- that thought still frightened him, but there
was little he
>could do about it. When he finally settled down, however, he went
back to
planning the concert. Everything had to go just perfect...

>
* * * * *

>
March 11, 2000

>
There was a knock on the door.

>
"Come in."

>
The door opened. "Five minutes, Miss Matsumoto. Oh, yeah, and
two

>non-regulars from your guest list are in the audience."

>Kana, applying the finishing touches to her makeup, looked over at
the
messenger. "Oh? Who?"

>
"A Mr. Asuma Shinohara and Ms. Noa Izumi."
>
"Noa!?" Kana repeated brightly. "Make certain to invite them
backstage
>after the performance, will you?"

>The messenger nodded. "Sure thing... who are they, by the way?"

>"They're the people who taught me how to pilot a labor. You
remember, that
Patlabor unit..."
>
"Oh, right. I'll make certain they get your invitation. Oh,
yeah, don't
>forget- five minutes."

>* * * * *

>The concert was nearing its conclusion. It had been quite enjoyable
for
Noa and Asuma- even though they didn't particularly care for
the music, the
>energy of the people in the audience was contagious.

>The infectious crowd was not the only thing, though, that was making
Noa
happy. At one point during the performance, Kana had started
singing a
>love song, and during that song Asuma had reached over and squeezed
her
hand. For some reason, that one little action seemed to
dissipate all the
>tension that she'd felt building since that fireworks show. For her,
this
little excursion was a victory, of sorts. The only problem
she was having,
>in fact, was that her back was still a little stiff. Maybe a nice
massage
would help....
>
"Say, Asuma," Noa said, trying to get heard over the cheers.
"Would you
>like to get out of here a little early and avoid the traffic?"

>Asuma wasn't paying attention to her. Instead, something else caught
his
eye. "Noa... is it just me, or are those two security people
heading
>towards us?"

>Noa barely made out what he was saying over the roar of the crowd.
Peering
over at what he was looking at, she cried. "Yeah! What do
you think they
>want?"

>"I dunno, but let's go talk to them. If there aren't any problems,
we'll
go after that."
>
Noa just nodded instead of trying to say anything. Leaving their
seats,
>they worked their way to the advancing security people.

>"Excuse me sir, ma'am. Are you Mr. Asuma Shinohara and Ms. Noa
Izumi?" the
first guard asked.
>
Noa and Asuma looked at each other in surprise. "Yes, that's who
we are,"
>Shinohara replied.

>"You've been invited backstage by Miss Kana. Do you wish to come
with us?"

>Asuma looked relieved now that he knew they weren't being called
into duty,
but Noa looked a little reluctant. Kana was a friend,
but she got a bit...
>annoying... in person. "Um... I'm not sure..." she tried to say.

>Unfortunately, she didn't say it loud enough for anyone to hear her.
"I
don't see why not," Asuma said, who didn't have any real bad
memories of

>Kana besides her brief flirtation with Izumi... which was something he
>thought was more fun teasing Noa with than getting jealous about. "Sure."
>>Noa sighed at hearing that. Oh, well- now she'd have to deal with the
>brat. At least the rest of the day had gone good up to that point... then
>again, the last time she'd had an exceptionally good day it was spoiled by
>Asuma's sudden hesitation regarding their relationship. Hopefully, that
>wouldn't happen again.
>>The two bulky security men escorted Noa and Asuma through the throngs as
>they made their way backstage. Just as Kana finished the concert, they
>arrived.
>>She passed them on her way back. "Hi, guys!" she said exuberantly (if
>breathlessly- she'd just finished a concert, after all). "I'll be back in
>a minute- just let me get changed." With a wave, she ducked out.
>>"Asuma," Noa said as Kana disappeared. "Why'd you agree to this? You know
>how annoying she is...."
>Asuma smirked. "Yeah... say, does this mean I win the bet I made in the
>hospital?"
>>Noa's eyes widened as she recalled the bet SHE with him- to annoy her in a
>way which was both intentional and non-offensive. He'd taken the bet
>almost too quick....
>>"Hey... did you PLAN all of this?"
>>"Not until I heard the offer to come backstage, but it works, doesn't it?"
>>"I'm not sure if it counts," Noa said. "After all, if you didn't plan it,
>how can it be intentional?"
>"I don't-"
>"Sorry to keep you waiting," Kana said, walking up to them. "It's so nice
>to see you both again!" With that, she through her arms around Noa to give
>her a hug she couldn't escape from.
>Asuma ALMOST started feeling jealous until Kana released that hug and
>glomped him instead. "Eep!" he cried as the breath was forced from his
>lungs.
>Finished with her greeting, Kana let go and turned. "Follow me- I know
>just the place where we can sit and talk."
>>* * * * *
>>Kana, Noa, and Asuma all sat around a small table, each with drinks in
>their hands. Noa and Asuma each had a coffee (Asuma wanted a beer, but
>there weren't any alcoholic beverages available in the backstage vending
>machines), while Kana sipped a hot cocoa.
>"Noa," Kana said plaintively. "Remember the time I was doing target
>practice in your labor? That was so much fun... you're both still in the
>SV2, right?"
>"Um... yeah," Noa replied, sighing. Yep, really annoying. Just like she'd
>feared.
>>"I wish I had a labor to pilot... then again, if I got a labor like yours,

>I'd be a target for people like that guy who kidnapped you, wouldn't I?"
Kana sighed. "I'm glad he did, though- he kept me from embarrassing myself
>too much with you."

>"Huh?" That statement threw Noa for a loop.

>"When I saw how much Asuma cared, I just knew I couldn't stand in the way
of your love for each other." She paused for a moment.
"You two DO still
>love each other, right?"

>"Um..." Noa and Asuma both hesitated. It was one thing to KNOW you were in
love with someone. It was a totally different thing to admit it when
>blatently confronted about it by someone else when you hadn't even told the
other person yet.
>
Kana nodded and sighed. "Yeah, guess you are. Anyway, if I can't get a
>labor like yours, maybe there's another type I could get which would be fun
to pilot around from time to time...."
>
* * * * *
>
Several hours later, Noa and Asuma were on the road back to the onsen. For
>the first time in a while, the silence was more or less comfortable...
well, at least it was for Noa. For Asuma, it wasn't really all that
>comfortable, as he was trying to decide if he should really say what he'd
been planning to say... and exactly how he should say it.

>
Finally coming to a decision, he cleared his throat.

>
"Noa," he said.
>
"Yes?" Noa replied, relaxed, not hearing the slight tremor of concern in
>his voice.

>"I just wanted to say... about what Kana asked us earlier tonight."

>"Yes?" Now, she knew that he was trying to say something important.

>"Noa, I just wanted you to know... um, she's right. I do... l-love you.
Deeply. Very deeply. I'm sorry about that fireworks show, I just wasn't
>ready to hear it then. Now, though.... I just thought you should know.
Now that I've realized it myself."
>
Noa was stunned. She didn't know what to say- she'd been worried he'd been
>distancing himself the whole week, but apparently, he was just working
himself up to saying this. The only thing that was clear, though, was a
>thought that kept echoing itself through her head. 'He said it! He SAID
it! I can't believe he said it!'
>
Asuma started getting more and more nervous as Noa didn't respond. Not
>able to stand it any more, he said, "Noa?"

>"Asuma... I love you too!" Noa cried, wrapping her arms around him.

>"Ack, Noa! Leggo, I gotta drive!" Asuma shouted, startled. Noa let go,
smiling widely. "I just wanted to say it, okay? It doesn't change
>anything, though. We still have to hide it and all-"

>"It doesn't matter," she interrupted. "Let's not worry about that right
now. I just want to be able to sit back and enjoy it for

now."

>
"Okay, Noa," Asuma agreed. "And... thank you."

>
"Huh? For what?"

>
"For not trying to run away. Thank you..."

>
Noa didn't understand that at all... then again, it didn't matter. He

>loved her. That was all that was important.

>End Notes: As a curiosity, some of the events referenced about the
hospital stay may be covered in an OAV I'm planning (I did mention that I'm

>planning a few Patlabor: Personal Files OAVs for those episodes which don't
fit in the regular series, right? Usually, these will cover events before

>the series starts or overlay events that happen in other episodes... though
occasionally, there'll be OAVs which are made OAVs because otherwise they'd

>contain spoilers for future episodes...). I have yet to decide if I WANT
to write the OAVs, however, so we'll see if I do them... at any rate,

>that's the current plan. Initially, I started coming up with the OAV
series idea as a way to offer openings for guest authors who might want to

>write in the series, but so far there ARE no guest authors... *sigh* If
anyone wants to BE a guest author and write either an OAV or an episode

>(there's still one opening available for the first season, but that'll
disappear in a few episodes), please let me know.

>
Next Episode: Chief Sakaki retires... but can the mechanics squad really

>survive without him?

>-----

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>Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the True Fiancee
anime fanfics available at

> <http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>

> <p><p>

17. Episode 17: A Most Unusual Retirement

Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>
Episode 17: A Most Unusual Retirement

>March 17, 2000

>"Hurry, Asuma!" Noa cried. "I want to get back to Alphonse as quickly as
possible!"

>
There was a reason Noa was so anxious to return to the side of her labor-

>for the first time in a long time, she was medically cleared to pilot it
again. With that in mind, Asuma had been speeding (or nearly speeding) the

>entire journey from the hospital.

>Noa had been afraid she wasn't going to pass those tests six days
beforehand. Her back was killing her then, and she was dreading the

>possibility that she'd reinjured it. What was even worse was the fear that
her relationship with Asuma was falling apart, as he'd been distancing
>himself from her for about a week beforehand.

>Oddly, Noa's back quit being so stiff shortly after Asuma told her he loved
her those six days ago. Well, part of that might have been that she'd
>invited him to give her a massage when they got back to the onsen- his
hands fumbled frequently as he tried to release the tension with his
>fingers, and the encounter didn't go any further than the gentle massage
she'd asked for, but Noa had definitely thought about LETTING him go
>further, if he'd wanted to.

>The massage really did little to relieve the stiffness, though- it was
mostly gone when they'd gotten there, and Asuma was so nervous about it
>that he was more likely to have ADDED to any pains than taken away from
them. Still, it had quickly disappeared after his confession.

>
Asuma finally moved into the parking lot, and Noa nearly leapt out of the
>car while it was still running. Quickly double-checking to make certain
that the doors were locked, he followed her path into the SV2 hanger as
>soon as he could.

>By the time he caught up with her, she was already suited up and heading
right for Alphonse's cockpit. She stopped long enough to smile at him and
>say a few words.

>"Shige's going to watch the shakedown run," she explained. "He's going to
be taking the command position to put Alphonse through a few tests."
>
Asuma nodded. During Noa's incapacitation, the mechanics had taken the
>opportunity to make a number of modifications to her labor-modifications
which would push its mechanics nearly up to the performance level of the
>Peacemakers- which hopefully would keep it from becoming technologically
obsolete for another year or so. At any rate, the modifications were so
>great that a serious shakedown run had to be made before it would be safe
to use Alphonse on calls. Since Asuma wasn't aware of exactly what tests
>were required, he knew someone else would have command for a little while.

>"I'll be watching with him. Have fun," he said.

>Noa nodded, resuming her dash for Alphonse with an expression of pure glee
on her face. He followed, smiling slightly. He wasn't sure he was
>completely over his jealousy of the labor, despite their little talk, but
he couldn't help but like it when she was THAT happy.

>
Still grinning, he made his way over to where Shige was adjusting the radio
>headset. "Need any help?" Asuma asked.

>"Nah," Shige replied. "This shakedown run shouldn't be too difficult."

>"You'll let Noa have some fun with him, right?"

>"Of course."

>Asuma watched as Shige put Noa through the drills. It appeared quite
similar to the standard shakedown run that any labor in Shinohara Heavy Industries was put through, and Alphonse was passing with flying colors.
>Sakaki approached the pair watching the tests about half-way through, a
barely restrained emotion that neither of them could identify on his face.
>"Shige," he said softly. "Hand the command over to Asuma and let him
finish the tests. I need to speak with you for a moment."

>
Shige blinked, surprised by Sakaki's odd tone of voice. "I, uh... okay.
>Noa, Asuma's going to take over for a bit- Chief needs to talk to me."
With that, he ripped off the headset and handed it to Asuma. Turning briskly, he followed Sakaki towards his office.
>Asuma replaced the radio on his head, adjusted the microphone, and said,
"Noa, can you read me?"
>
Noa's voice cheerily answered him, "Loud and clear, Asuma! What's going on?"
>"Dunno. Sakaki was acting strangely," he said, thinking. "Hmm... seems to
me Alphonse tests just fine when it comes to strength and maneuverability, right?"
>"Check," Noa agreed. "He's tuned up well and good. Sakaki does a good job
with him."
>
"How 'bout checking some of his sensors for a while, instead? Ya know...
>maybe, say, try focusing in on a certain conversation to see if the audio
recording devices are able to pick up everything they're supposed to?"
>
Noa didn't respond for a second. "Asuma... are you asking me to do what I think you're asking me to do?"
>"Depends, what do you think I'm asking you to do?" he replied, smirking.
>The sigh could be heard even through the headphones. "You know, one of
these stunts you keep getting us into is going to get us thrown out of the SV2, someday. When we get kicked out, I'm going to get awfully mad at
you." There was a pause. "Testing auditory detection system. Relaying results to you..."
>The sound of Sakaki's somewhat distorted gravelly voice kicked in. "...ber
that as chief mechanic, your job won't just be assigning people to the right job and keeping track of how progress is, but also maintaining
discipline among the unit. If you recall..." A spurt of interference garbled his next few words.
>"Hmm... there's some distortion and interference. Check the callibration
for the reciever," Asuma ordered.

>
"Acknowledged," Noa replied, somewhat relieved. It didn't sound like they were eavesdropping on anything important, and her conscience was greatly
relieved.
>
The sound cleared up just as Shige started talking. "Chief, this

is all

>stuff you've said a million times before. What's the point of all this?"
he said.

>
Sakaki paused. "Shige... I got a memo, today, letting me know that, since

>I passed fifty-five years of age earlier this month, I'm going to have to
retire on the 31st. You are about to become 'Chief' Shige."

>
The silence that followed was palpable. "Noa," Asuma said softly. "I

>think that's enough testing for today."

>* * * * *

>March 31, 2000

>For a party, it was remarkably somber. The catered food was of the best
quality and variety, the live band was playing cheery toons, and everyone

>attending knew everybody else. The reason for the party, however, was
enough to sadden most of those attendees.

>
A few people had made an attempt to have fun. Natsume had cornered both

>Joudo and Shige for dances, Gotoh had attempted the same with Shinobu (to
be shot down, as usual), Koichi Miyagi was telling- and laughing at- a

>number of bad jokes, and a number of those who were not part of the SV2-
largely relatives and senior officers- were either dancing or chatting

>about nothing in particular.

>Asuma, somewhat half-heartedly, had asked Noa to dance. Noa, however,
wasn't in the mood to dance, either. Almost no-one, in fact, felt up to

>much celebrating.

>It was the last day of Mechanics Section Chief Sakaki's career, and the
demoralizing effect of his retirement was palpable. No-one, it seemed,

>wanted the old man to go.

>Shige had been in almost constant conference with Sakaki since finding out
about his impending departure. The dance with Natsume, in fact, was his

>first waking moment out of earshot of the retiring chief.

Thankfully, he
was finally excused from having to hear the same lecture for the umpteenth

>time, and so he was one of the few in a good mood. It was still tempered,
however, by the knowledge he'd never be able to go to the Chief for a piece

>of advice if things got out of his control. Vaguely, he recalled the
infamous Seven Days that he had been partially responsible for sending the

>SV2 Mechanics into near civil war, and hoped he was up to the task of
command.

>
Sakaki, himself, had a grim expression on his face. Gotoh, in concern,

>approached him cautiously. "What do you think of all this?" the captain
asked the soon-to-be-civilian.

>
"No-one's enjoying themselves," Sakaki answered simply.

>
"They don't want you to leave."

>
"I don't want to leave, either. But I'd like to enjoy myself at my own

>retirement party."

>Gotoh shrugged. "They're trying, they just can't do it." He paused.

"I
have a proposal for you, if you don't want to give this up, entirely."

>
"Oh?" Sakaki asked, his voice quirking in curiosity.

>
"I wouldn't be surprised if your services are needed from time to time in

>the future. Shige's never been in sole command of anything for any length
of time, and if things spin out of control I'd like to be able to call you

>to help clean up the mess."

>"Not a good idea," Sakaki noted. "Shige would quickly get too dependant on
me."

>
Gotoh nodded. "Just one time, perhaps?"

>
"Well... perhaps once. We'll see."

>
Gotoh nodded. "Good. Say, have you seen the incident reports we've

>recently been getting?"

>Sakaki frowned. "Yes," he admitted hesitantly.

>"Good. I suspect there'll be something left on your property after your
retirement that'll allow you to keep from getting too rusty in the

>mechanics field. I trust you'll keep in practice well enough to keep a
number of labors in tip-top shape while you're retired."

>
For a moment, Sakaki wasn't sure he understood. Then, however, he got it.

>"Of course, Captain. I think I know what you mean perfectly." He smirked.
 "I don't suppose I'll be allowed to read those incident reports any more,

>will I?"

>Gotoh nodded. "Not unless some of them accidentally show up at your house,
every week."

>
"Well, if any show up around my place, I'd know what to do with them."

>
Gotoh smiled. "Good. Now, why don't we see if we can't get this party of

>yours going, eh?"

>* * * * *

>April 12, 2000

>Shige rubbed his eyes in exhaustion. It had been a tiring month-first,
all of the last minute instruction from Sakaki before his retirement had

>taken up his every waking moment. The day that he was finally gone, he had
begun to realize just WHY so much last minute instruction was needed.

>
When he became the chief of the mechanics squad himself, he was overwhelmed

>by the sheer amount of paperwork he had to go through. True, he had some
paperwork before his promotion to Chief, but nothing like the workload he

>was getting after Sakaki left- especially since, until they found a
replacement, he was now doing BOTH their jobs. And there was a LOT more to

>the added responsibilities than the paperwork- he had to supervise a number
of jobs, and found frequently that he wasn't able to give nearly the

>attention to detail that he had before.

>What was even worse was that no-one acted like he was really in charge.
Oh, sure, they did what he assigned them to do, but he wasn't able to

>instill any form of discipline in them at all. At times, he used to

think
that the crew could be as undisciplined as they wanted and it wouldn't

>effect their work, but now he was almost ready to bring back the code of
rules which had initiated the seven days of infamy, as they were now doing

>things like using spare parts for the command cars to build freeze-drying
equipment for their fishing industry.

>
It didn't help that they were having one of their busiest periods in

>months. The criminal element was acting up somewhat more than it usually
did, but even worse were the heavy rains which caused significant strains

>not just on the labors, but on the command cars and transports as well. In
fact, there had been a number of minor accidents involving wet roads and

>high speed driving.

>Shige wasn't sure he could take much more of it. Resolved, he started to
Section Chief Fukushima's office- because, for once, the highest ranking

>officer in Special Vehicles Second Section was where he was supposed to be.
Maybe there was a chance he could request a replacement, and no longer

>have to worry about all of the duties of leadership.

>Just as he was about to knock on the door, it opened in front of him and
Gotoh stepped out, carrying a file. "Ah, Shige!" he said.

>
"Captain Gotoh, sir!" Shige said, snapping to attention.

>
Gotoh smirked. "I'm not 'sir' any more, remember? Technically, you're MY

>superior, now."

>"Oh, right...."

>"Can you come with me for a minute? There's something I wanted to talk to
you about."

>
Shige paused, looking past him to see Fukushima sitting in his office.

>"Well, I was hoping to talk to the Section Chief."

>"He's promised he'll be here for another week, at least. This is something
I really want to get done today."

>
"Well, I'm VERY busy, and-"

>
"All I want you to do is run a minor errand for me, off base. It's

>something I think you would enjoy doing, anyway...."

>* * * * *

>Shige knocked on the door, holding the package he had been asked to deliver
under his arm. He was a little surprised- he knew that, among a few

>letters, there were a few (probably stolen) obsolete labor parts, a copy of
the week's incident reports, and a classified file that Gotoh had just

>recieved from Fukushima. If the delivery had been to any other person, he
would have refused and reported it immediately, but in this case... well,

>he was just hoping he wasn't caught by anyone.

>A young woman opened the door. She was rather plump, but was otherwise
just an ordinary looking teenager. "Oh, hello," the girl said. "Uncle

>Sake said he was expecting you."

>Shige blinked. "Uncle Sake?"

>The girl blushed and giggled. "Sorry- that's what my brother called

him
when Uncle drunk him under the table, and it's kinda stuck.
You know him
>as just 'Chief Sakaki.'"

>Shige still wasn't able to comprehend that one. "Uncle SAKE?!"

>Sakaki walked into the room, noticed both his former subordinate and his
niece, and growled. "Get out of here, Megumi, or I'll tell him about the
>pork bun incident."

>Her eyes widened. "Um... no need for you to do that, Uncle... I think I
just remembered a homework assignment I forgot to do. See you later..."
>With the utmost haste, she ran out of the room, almost damaging the door as
she left.
>
"Kids," Sakaki snorted. "Come on, Shige, I'll get you something to drink.
>And, retired or not, I swear that if you repeat that nickname to ANYONE,
I'll throw you into the sea!"
>
"Right, chief," Shige replied, looking adequately cowed.

>
Together, they passed through a section of the immense (by Tokyo standards)
>mansion that Sakaki and his family lived in, until they reached a small
courtyard. It was when they were in the courtyard that Shige realized what
>the labor parts in the package were for.

>"The Ancient Warriors," he gasped, staring at the four antiquated
patlabors- two type 96s and two type 97s.
>
"Yep," Sakaki said, taking the package from him before he dropped it.
>
"Headquarters didn't try to reclaim them when you retired?"

>
Sakaki didn't say anything for a moment, instead concentrating on finding a
>tool to help him break open the parcel's seal. "It's kind of funny,
really," he finally spoke after opening it, taking out a lone piece out of
>the equipment and looking at it carefully, checking for any imperfections
which would render it unusable. "But the Quartermaster Corps has a little
>known secret: Unlike the military, which keeps track of every piece of
equipment purchased since the dawn of time, practically, if something has
>been on the general Police department's inventory books for one year past
its expected life span, they just remove it from the record- it's easier to
>do that then process all of the 'lost\expended' equipment forms we send
them. Like these parts here- because the labors they're designed for were
>supposed to have been replaced three years ago, they just forgot about 'em.
They've never been used, though, and should work just fine." He paused.
>"The 96's were off their record books way back before we even retired the
97s. Headquarters never even knew we used one to replace Ohta's labor in
>Unit 3 when it went down. Turns out the 97s went off the record book right
after Unit 3 was formed, so as far as Quartermasters Corps is concerned,
>these labors don't exist, despite the fact they cost hundreds of millions
when we purchased them. Don't let Ohta know that, though-

if he did, then
>he'd know we actually have enough extra ammo to let him fire an
extra
hundred rounds a month."
>
Shige blinked. "Wow... these could easily be modified for
construction or
>something, and should still be worth a lot of money."

>Sakaki nodded. "If I was a real corrupt bastard, I might consider
doing
something like that. Instead, though, I plan on holding
these babies in
>reserve."

>"In reserve? In reserve for what?"

>Sakaki pulled out the classified file that Gotoh had sent him.
Tapping it
with one finger, he said, "We aren't sure yet, but we
know it's something.
>That firebombing at the docks, a few month ago- the one which
totalled
Ohta's 97 and covered up that theft of Babylon Project
equipment- and the
>raid on the Quartermasters Corp back in February... we aren't sure
how yet,
but we think they, and some of the other odd labor crimes
lately, are
>connected. Not that the administration will admit it, but
something's
happening out there. You'd better be keeping those
labors in tip top shape
>over there, Shige, or things might be out of our hands, despite all
of
this."
>
Shige looked down, embarrassed. "Chief, I'm not sure that I...
I..."
>
Sakaki looked him up and down. "Relax," he said. "I know it's
hard at
>first. It'll seem overwhelming for a while, but you'll get used to
it. I
wouldn't have let you have the job if I didn't believe
that."
>
"But the pressure!" Shige cried desperately. "I can't even get
any
>mechanical work done, I'm so flooded with paperwork, and the
supervision- I
have to correct someone at least four times each
job! It just seems so
>impossible to keep up!"

>"You'll manage," Sakaki said. "You learn a few things which cannot
be
taught along the way to help out with the time situation-
remember what I
>said about Quartermasters Corps. never checking out the
'lost\expended'\
forms we fill out? They only ever get seen if
there's some kind of
>internal investigation going on, so as long as you fill out the
parts
likely to be audited okay, you can skip most of the
technical stuff. They
>don't need to know who was captain of which unit at the time, and
that sort
of stuff... but be sensible about it. Don't forget to
include what the
>item is which we lost, for instance. That could get you into
SERIOUS
trouble."
>
He paused, letting that sink in. It appeared as though Shige
wasn't going
>to say anything in response, either to continue the tirade against
his own
prowess as a manager or to admit that Sakaki could be
right.
>
The former chief sighed, putting a supporting hand on the
younger man's
>shoulder. "That's the sort of thing only experience teaches you,

and
that's why I never said anything about it before. But you'll cope with the
>difficulties, I'm sure of it. And if you need some advice, don't hesitate
to talk to Gotoh. I'll help out, too, if I feel like it, but he's smart.
>Smarter than I am, and one tough cookie... he'll get you out of messes
worse than I ever had to deal with."
>
Shige smiled half-heartedly, encouraged by the pep talk.
"Thanks, Chief."
>I needed that." Desperately hoping to change the subject, he returned his
attention to the old labors standing proudly in the yard. "So,
>headquarters just forgot about them, huh?"

>Sakaki sighed, taking in the sight with him. "Yeah... headquarters forgets
about a lot of things. Ammo, labors, files... people. A lot of things."
>

>Next Episode: The SV2 in Osaka needs a replacement pilot. So, who from
our local Tokyo branch might be tapped to take the job?

>

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the True Fiancee
> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
> List owner of the Temporary FFML Refuge (FFML-R)
 To subscribe, send a blank message to
> FFMLRefuge-subscribe@listbot.com
 And follow the instructions in the response...

18. Episode 18: The Candidate

From: "David A. Tatum" desaix@sysnet.net

>To: "David A. Tatum" desaix@sysnet.net
Subject: PLB18.txt

>Date: Friday, October 12, 2001 1:19 PM

>Patlabor: Personal Files
An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum

>Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>Episode 18: The Candidate
March 26, 2000

>(Note: You may notice a little time overlap with the last chapter. This is
intentional)

>
Much to everyone's surprise, Chief Fukushima had actually shown up at SV2

>Headquarters in the morning. He immediately retreated into his office, and
hadn't been seen since.

>
Fukushima's entrance into the Captain's officer later in the day was even

>more surprising.

>"Sir!" Gomioka cried, jumping to his feet and saluting as the division chief
entered the room. Shinobu also rose to attention, but didn't bother

>saluting. Gotoh was present as well, but he was off duty thanks to a shift
change with Gomioka and so was napping in his desk chair.

Shinobu woke him

>by clearing her throat, and he slowly stood as well.

>"At ease," Fukushima said. "I'm glad you're all here. I need to talk

to
all three of you."

>
Gotoh yawned. "I wondered why you came in, today."

>
Not even acknowledging Gotoh's presence, Fukushima opened the folder he was

>carrying and pulled out a piece of paper. "I've recieved a communique from
the Special Vehicles division in Osaka. They're searching for a new labor

>pilot, and don't feel as though any of their own boys are qualified. We
wouldn't happen to have anyone willing and able to fill the position, would

>we?"

>Gotoh shook his head. "I can't afford to separate Noa and Asuma, and Takeo
doesn't want to be a pilot. Hiromi might be able to, if he can physically

>handle the labor- what type does Osaka have, nowadays?"

>"SR-70s," Fukushima said, shooting a look Shinobu's way.

>"Cockpit's too small. Hiromi needs something designed for larger men."

>"I don't have anyone capable of piloting a labor," Shinobu noted.

"My
veterans are physically incapable of it, and my rookies aren't skilled

>enough."

>Fukushima nodded. "Very well. How about you, Captain Gomioka?"

>He hesitated. "Give me a day to look into it. I've got a few people who
might be capable- Yamane Seiroku was a hair's breath away from being a labor

>pilot during the tournament, and our American Exchange pilot, Kanuka Clancy,
is more than capable... though she would only be able to act as an interim

>pilot. I may even have someone else, but I'm not sure yet...."

>Fukushima nodded. "Very well- I'll be working here for the next month, so
you should be able to get me any time. But you're a bit inexperienced in

>these situations, so get the approval of either Gotoh or Nagumo before you
send him to me."

>
"Yes, sir." Gomioka had to concur with the inexperienced part, but if he

>had to get approval he'd seek out Shinobu's before anyone else's.

>Once Fukushima had departed, Gotoh turned to Gomioka, scratching the stubble
on his chin in thought. "Kanuka won't want to go to Osaka. The whole

>reason she's here with us is because her Grandmother is nearby."

>Gomioka shrugged. "Won't hurt to ask- maybe she can get some extra help in
Osaka that she can't get here. But Seiroku is the one who I think is most

>likely to want the job. He's been begging for a spot as a labor pilot since
he got here, and he's really too good a pilot to be stuck in the command

>car."

>Gotoh sighed. "I'd try to hang onto him, if he's really that good.
However, if you really want to ask him..."

>
"I do."

>
"I won't hesitate to second your choice of Kanuka, if she wants it, but if

>you expect either of us to approve of this Seiroku guy then I'm going to
want to investigate him. I suspect Shinobu will, too. Would you get us >each a copy of his personnel file, as well as all of the incident reports he
's been involved with since he's been assigned here?"

>
Gomioka grimaced at the paperwork, but once more had to admit that there >was the need for such an investigation. "I'll go copy them, and get back
here in half an hour."
>
Gotoh nodded. "Thanks."
>
"So, Gotoh," Shinobu said, apparently trying to make small talk, as Gomioka >left the room. "Anything new happening in your squad?"
>"Well, Noa and Asuma will be out tomorrow for personal reasons- a birthday
party, I think. And the plans for Sakaki's retirement party are >underway..."
>The door closed behind him. Gomioka shook his head. "Isn't that the same
conversation they've been having since the end of January? I seems like >ever since THAT night they've been completely unable to relate to each
other...."
>
"Eh? What are you muttering about?"
>
Gomioka blinked. "Eh? Chief Sakaki! I thought you were giving your >last-minute lessons to Shige."
>Sakaki shook his head in frustration. "He fell asleep. After only
thirty-six hours, too- the boy's got no endurance."

>
"Uh, right."
>
"So, what was it you were mumbling about? Gotoh and Shinobu, right?" he >asked.
>Gomioka sighed. No point in denying the obvious. "Well, yeah. Ever since
that night when... well, ever since late January, they seem to be struggling >to make conversation whenever they can. It makes things... unpleasant... to
sit around the office with them. Shinobu, especially- she seems uncertain >how to respond every time Gotoh talks to her."
>Sakaki shrugged. "It's understandable. Gotoh helped her through a very
difficult situation- one where she drank herself into a stupor. And she's >likely still embarrassed with how she revealed so many personal details in
one sitting with him. And I happen to know a bit more happened that she'd >be uncomfortable about, too." He smirked slightly. "Gotoh's a good man for
having restrained himself with her, that night."

>
"Huh?"
>
Sakaki shook his head. "Never you mind- I don't want to get too into their >private business with you. But they'll be fine, don't worry. You only have
to put up with them for a short time."
>
Gomioka looked at Sakaki oddly. "Why are you even telling me this much? I' >m hardly one of your usual confidants...."
>"No, but I'm not going to be here much longer," Sakaki said. "I don't
really like you, Gomioka. You treat your labors and your

pilots wrong. I

>don't particularly like Ohta- he's wrecked his labor so many times I've only
been able to go home a half dozen times in more than a year- but he's good

>at what he does. You act as though he doesn't deserve his post, sometimes."

>"I don't-" Seiroku protested.

>"However, you are a responsible man," Sakaki noted. "I need someone who can
take care of certain things involving your fellow captains when I'm gone.

>And I think I can trust you to handle that."

>Gomioka hesitated. "Uh... what kinds of things?"

>"It's no secret that Gotoh has a crush on Shinobu," Sakaki explained.
"However, not as many people know that Shinobu loves it when Gotoh acts on

>that crush. Are you aware of the events which sent her into command of the
SV2? A 'promotion' that was meant more as a punishment than as a reward?"

>
Sakaki shifted uncomfortably. "Vaguely. Something about her having an

>affair with a married man."

>Sakaki nodded. "Well, what you probably don't know is that it wasn't until
'that night,' as you call it, that Shinobu realized the affair was over.

>She got drunk, and tried to seduce him. Gotoh refused her, because he didn't
want to take advantage of her like that."

>
Gomioka's assessment of Gotoh's character rose a notch at that. "Wow."

>
"Since then, I'm the only person either of them have talked to about that

>incident," Sakaki continued. "Because they both know I won't use this
information against them. In fact, I'm the only person who knows exactly

>what each of them feels for the other, because I'm the only one who they'll
talk to about their relationship." He paused. "I know you like Shinobu,

>Gomioka."

>Gomioka stumbled slightly, bewildered by Sakaki's perceptiveness.

"I, uh-"

>"Don't worry. Neither of them know about it. But you have to remember you're
married, and you can't pursue a relationship with Shinobu. She's been

>hurt once by a married man, and won't let herself be hurt again."

>"Now, wait a minute. I never said I was going to-"

>"You never said you weren't, either," Sakaki replied.

>'Damn right," Gomioka thought. 'Perhaps her first affair failed, but... I
can make things work between us, if she'll just look at me.'

>
"I need you to set those feelings and desires aside," Sakaki said. "Neither

>of them will ever trouble their junior officers with such trivial matters,
and while Shige will actually be promoted over them in the grand scheme of

>things, I don't think they'll see him as having the necessary maturity to
handle their complaints. You, however, they will be able to talk to." He

>paused. "I don't want you dishing out bad advice just because you want
their relationship to fail. I don't know whether you would or

wouldn't, but
>you have to realize... after this creep broke up with Shinobu without
anything more than a postcard- he didn't even phone her, or send her a
>decent letter- Gotoh became her crutch. And there's an incident in Gotoh's
past which forged her into his crutch... they've been leaning heavily on
>each other for some time now, so heavily it's less like a crutch and more
like a new limb. Don't mess it up."
>
Gomioka gave Sakaki a hard stare. "I would NEVER do anything which would
>hurt Shinobu."

>"I know," Sakaki nodded. "But I needed to let you know a way you could have
hurt her without intending to. And I felt you needed the warning that this
>was coming- you're going to have to prepare to be their support when I'm
gone."
>
Gomioka slowly bowed his head in acknowledgement. "Thank you for your help,
>sir."

>Sakaki shook his head. "No, son. Thank you for helping them."

>* * * * *

>Gotoh read through the files on Seiroku that Gomioka had given to him.
Frowning, he said, "Is this it?"
>
"I think so," Gomioka said. "Why? What more are you looking for?"
>
Gotoh glanced up at him. "Well, anything more on what he was doing before
>coming to the SV2. So far, all I see are the incident reports from since he
joined us. There's nothing at all about the incident with Ueki Mashimo,
>which surely would have had something written on it. Even if it's just a
cover story, I was hoping to see that."
>
Gomioka shook his head. "Sorry, all records before the first of this year
>are sealed up in the Academy files. Apparently, he wanted to be in labors
from the moment he joined, because he was doubling his academy studies for
>both policework and labor operation simultaneously."

>Gotoh picked up the phone. "I think I'd better call Fuji and see if I can
make an appointment to come and see those sealed records." He pulled out
>the interdepartmental phone book and started glancing through it.

>Gomioka looked around. "Where's Shinobu? I've got her copies with me,
 too."
>
Gotoh started dialing. "Just leave them on her desk. She had to distribute
>some assignments to her unit. Kitchen detail, that kind of thing."

>Gomioka nodded. "Ah. You know, Sakaki and I just had a very interesting
conversation."
>
"Is that so?"
>
"It was about you and Shinobu," he noted.
>
Gotoh looked up at the other captain. "If so, I shouldn't know about it.
>Just remember to listen to him when he has something to say. He knows more
than you and I ever will." There was a pause, before he started speaking

>into the phone, trying to arrange a meeting with the Academy officials in
Fuji.
>
Shinobu finally returned to the room. "Have you got the report copied,
> yet?" she asked.

>Gomioka nodded. "On your desk."

>Shinobu picked it up. "Good. I'm going to be out of the office for a
while- I've got to take our labors out for a bit of a milkrun, Fukushima's
>orders. He cornered me and said he wants to 'test' certain things which we
already know what the results will be. He just wants to see them for
>himself."

>All three captains rolled their eyes. The idiocy of the police bureaucracy
with regards to the SV2 was well known to all of them. "Good luck," Gotoh
>mouthed to her, still with his ear to the phone.

>She grabbed the reports. "I'll read these while I'm out. See you."

>"Bye," Gomioka said while Gotoh waved.

>They worked on by themselves for a few more minutes, Gotoh finally making
his appointment for much later that afternoon. He stood and yawned. "Well,
>I'm going to go catch forty winks in my private room. Keep an eye on
things. Oh, and be sure you let Shinobu know I want to talk to her about my
>findings at the Academy before she makes a decision."

>Gomioka nodded silently, busy with some paperwork. A few minutes later, the
phone rang and he picked it up. "Gomioka here. Yes, but she's out on
>another assignment. Yes, sir- I'll assemble my team and head out there
right away."
>
* * * * *
>
About an hour later, Shinobu returned from her milk run. Glancing around
>the office, she noticed neither of the other captains were present. She
double-checked Gotoh's private room, and noticed him sprawled out on top of
>the covers. Shaking her head in amused disgust, she fixed the covers before
returning to the office and investigating Gomioka's absense.
>
"Hmm... his keys and vest are missing... he must have gone out on a call,"
>she noted.

>She sat down, and opened the files on Yamane Seiroku that she'd been
carrying with her since that morning, and started reading. His background
>was a little sparse, but she wasn't really interested in that. Instead, she
was much more concerned with how effective he had been as a labor officer.
>She noticed the side note in the folder about one of his opponent's labors
being defective in the placement tournament. She went back to the video
>archives and pulled out the tapes relating to that tournament and started
watching them.
>
"He's pretty good," Shinobu appraised. "He probably had prior experience as
>a pilot."

>The phone rang, and she quickly snatched it up. "Hello?"

>"Shinobu, thank god!" a frenzied Gomioka replied over the phone.
"We're
pinned down in a firefight, and- OHTA! GET BACK HERE! Shit!
Look, I gotta
>go- contact headquarters, they can tell you how to get to us. Send
backup-
hurry!"
>
There was a click, and Shinobu stared at the phone in shock. A
firefight?
>With labors? That could wreck several city blocks if the fighting
was
severe enough.
>
She had to get down there fast- the gods only knew what was
going on.
>
* * * * *
>
An explosion shook the building Gomioka was leaning against, and
he barely
>was able to dodge several large concrete chunks of debris that
nearly landed
on his head. "Hell! Can anyone see what's going on?"
he cried. He'd long
>since been unable to follow the action in the rising dust
clouds.

>"We were able to destroy the entrance. The other smuggled labors are
now
sealed up inside of the warehouse," Kanuka reported. "Officer
Seiroku did
>it by stealing one of the Brochen's and using its weapons to
collapse the
entrance- it would take several hours to dig out the
labors. However, the
>four Doshka's and two Brochen's which had escaped earlier are still
on the
rampage. Seiroku is moving to join our two Ingrams and face
them, but we're
>severely outmatched."

>"Shinobu, where are you," Gomioka muttered. He hadn't known when
he'd taken
the call that the smuggling operation he'd been sent to
bust was smuggling
>military labors. Why would anyone NEED a military labor, anyway?
Unless
they were trying to fight a war, that is... and it wasn't
like there were
>very many wars going on in his region of the world at the
moment.

>Another labor stepped by and covered him with an arm as another load
of
debris was about to fall on him. It wasn't one of Shinobu's
labors, but it
>was still some help- from the second call he'd made on that
assignment.

>"Team Raven here," the female labor pilot noted. "We got your call.
What's
the situation?"
>
Taking a moment to collect himself, Gotoh figured out the most
succinct way
>of explaining things. "We arrived on a report of someone
illegally
smuggling labors into the country. When we got here, we
discovered ten each
>of four different nation's military labors- Doshka's from Russia,
Brochen's
from Germany, Juggernauts from America, and Dragon's
from China. Upon
>noticing us, the criminals quickly rushed to board these smuggled
labors.
Six escaped in their control- four Doshka's and two
Brochen's. One of my
>officers took control of a Brochen sealed the remaining military
labors
inside, but the six escapees are currently engaged in
combat with my two
>patlabors. Our captured Brochen is moving in to join them."

>"Acknowledged," the Raven pilot said. "Usually, we prefer to work in
secret, but since you invited us here, we can actually work publically.
>Still, we'd like to restrict our activities as much as possible. Please
co-ordinate with your labors- you handle the Brochen's. We will move to
>take out the Doshka's."

>"Roger," Gomioka replied. "Ohta! Kenji! Yamane! Back off the Doshka's-
we've got some back-up here which will handle them. Concentrate on the
>Brochen's."

>"Yes, sir!" Kenji Iguchi's voice replied.

>"Will comply," Seiroku's voice noted.

>Gomioka waited patiently, then sighed. "Ohta, acknowledge!"

>"I hear you," Ohta growled. "Request permission to continue operating
against the Doshka's until the back-up arrives."

>
"Negative- the back-up is here already. Three military labors from Raven
>team."

>"You don't think I can handle these things, do you? Look, Captain, I'm
already-"
>
"I DON'T GIVE A FUCK IF YOU CAN HANDLE THEM OR NOT!" Gomioka shouted. "OBEY
>YOUR ORDERS!"

>"I can't, sir!" Ohta snapped back. "I'm already-"

>"You'd better!"

>"But-"

>A loud explosion shuddered throughout the street, almost knocking Gomioka
off his feet. "What was that? Hello- does anyone here me?" Not hearing
>any reply, he checked his radio. The shell was torn off of it and some of
the interior circuitry was exposed. "Damn it, why does this stuff happen to
>me?" he shouted, tossing the ruined radio to the ground and stepping on it,
smashing it even further.
>
* * * * *
>
Shinobu was the first one to return to headquarters. She and her team had
>arrived shortly after Raven team had isolated three of the Doshka's from the
rest of the fight. Ohta was trying to face off one-on-one against the last
>Doshka, and Kenji Iguchi and Yamane Seiroku were just barely able to match
up against the two Brochens. Shinobu had brought her third labor, and with
>Kanuka's help three type Zero patlabors were able to move in and overwhelm
the criminals. Raven Team had demolished the three Doshkas they had
>challenged, and all that was left was mop-up duties. Shinobu had left
Gomioka to handle that, and returned home to be on call.

>
When she went back to her office, she noticed that Gotoh wasn't in, despite
>it being his standby shift. At first, she thought he was still asleep, but
then she noticed a note on his desk. "Gone to Fuji on business- Takeo's in
>charge until I return."

>"Why's he in Fuji?" she muttered to herself, returning to her desk. She
returned to the files on Seiroku, and frowned. He had

certainly done a very
>good job earlier today. He had made a mistake, however- he hadn't
accounted
for the fact that 30+ military labors, working together,
could easily break
>down a wall of a warehouse and escape. Somewhere out there,
Thirty-three
military labors of various types were in hiding,
possibly awaiting sale to
>some element of organized crime here in Japan, or maybe being sent
overseas
to some mercenary outfit or drug cartel.

>
Regardless, his quick action had apparently saved Unit 3 from
being wiped
>out. Had all of the military labors been brought into action, not
even the
arrival of her and Raven team's labors would have been
enough. In an action
>like that, survival was the priority, and he helped his team
survive. That,
combined with his previous record, finally made her
decision for her.
>Nodding to herself, she darted down the stairs to wait for Gomioka's
unit to
return. She had to have a talk with this young man.

>
* * * * *
>
Gotoh frowned. "These records don't make any sense."
>
"Eh? What do you mean?" the Academy's records officer said.

>
"How did he ever pass his background checks?" Gotoh asked.
"These records
>are obvious fakes- his listed high school burned down two years
before he
should have started their- I was at that site when it
happened. And too
>many of the others things he reports here just sound too faked. The
listed
names for his relatives are identical to various historical
personages, for
>example."

>The record keeper shrugged. "I dunno about the high school, but
the
relatives thing could just be a coincidence."
>
Gotoh frowned. "Did you guys actually conduct a background check
on this
>guy?"

>"I'm not sure. Thanks to budget constraints, we only conduct
real
background checks on one out of every ten people. We usually
just call the
>phone numbers they give to make sure the references the candidate
gives
really exist."
>
Gotoh nodded. "I see. Tell me, do you still fingerprint
everyone, or has
>that been lost due to 'budget constraints' too?"

>* * * * *

>Unit Three pulled into the building and its members slowly started
leaving
their vehicles. They looked worn out- as if they were
about to collapse on
>their feet. In fact, last time Shinobu had seen people looking this
tired,
she later caught Noa Izumi sleeping in a closet after a
battle with the
>Griffin.

>Gomioka looked decidedly upset, but upon seeing Shinobu he seemed
to
restrain himself. "Captain," he said formally, bowing his head.

>
She thought about trying to see if she could soothe him-
obviously, he was

>upset about something which happened on the assignment, but she decided it
would be inappropriate for her to do anything. He had to learn to deal with
>things on his own.

>"I'd like to speak with Mr. Seiroku, if I may."

>He nodded. "Of course. SIEROKU!"

>The young man tiredly jogged over to the two captains. "Yes, sir?"

>"Captain Shinobu wants to have a word with you."

>Shinobu nodded. "Yes, please... can you come up with me to the office? I
want to talk with you in private."
>
He looked uncomfortable, but nodded. "Yes, ma'am."
>
She lead the man up into the office, and sat at her desk. "Please, sit
>down."

>Nervously, he did. "Um, yes, ma'am." He paused. "Am I in trouble, ma'am?"

>Shinobu's eyes widened in surprise. "No, of course not! Why do you think
you are?"
>
Seiroku hesitated. "Well, we didn't succeed in stopping the smuggling
>ring..."

>Shinobu shook her head. "In that situation, there was no way to succeed.
Survival was the important thing, and you enabled your team to survive."
>
He looked relieved. "Thank you for your support, ma'am."

>
"Actually, I called you up here to offer you a new position," she noted.
>
Seiroku looked confused. "Ma'am?"
>
"There's a vacancy in the SV2 at Osaka for a labor pilot. Gomioka submitted
>your name for that position, saying that you had expressed to him a desire
to pilot labors. The nomination requires that either I or Captain Gotoh
>second him. I've been checking out your record, and I believe you are MORE
than capable of handling the assignment..."

>
Seiroku smiled hesitantly. "Thank you, ma'am, but... please don't. If it
>means leaving Captain Gomioka, I'd rather not."

>Shinobu was surprised. She, personally, thought rather well of her former
labor pilot and second in command. However, she didn't think he'd been
>doing a very good job at being a captain so far- yet it seems he was able to
inspire loyalty in some of his men, after all. Maybe he was actually
>learning something about the job, after all.

>"Are you sure? I mean, I don't think it's likely you'll wind up with a
pilot's position here."
>
Seiroku hesitated, but nodded. "Yes, I'm sure. I know he's not the best,
>but Captain Gomioka has really treated me well. And he needs competent
people working for him- I may not be the best, but I can see that he needs
>more people like myself and officer Clancy if he wants to succeed. I want
him to succeed, and I'm afraid he won't be able to grow into being a good
>commander if I abandon him right now. Maybe after he's had some time to
grow into his position a bit, but he's already lost one officer

in the past
>four months, he shouldn't need to deal with the loss of another so soon."

>Shinobu sighed. "Very well, Mr. Seiroku. I'll let Chief Fukushima know. I
want Gomioka to succeed, myself, you know- I certainly won't force you to
>abandon him so fast."

>Seiroku nodded. "Thank you, ma'am."

>Shinobu looked down at his folder as he left the office. 'Nice kid,' she
thought to herself. 'I wish I had a few more like him, myself.'
>
* * * * *
>
Gotoh returned to the warehouse portion of SV2 Headquarters from his trip to
>Fuji to find Gomioka more angry than he'd ever seen him before. The target
of his wrath was a more or less obvious one- Ohta, who constantly did things
>to get his fellow officers mad at him- but the vehemence with which the
captain was chewing out the labor pilot was shocking.

>
"You're ALWAYS saying things like 'you don't know what it was like at the
>scene, sir!' or 'A cop is supposed to expect the unexpected!' If I hear you
say that bullshit ONE MORE TIME, I'm fining you one month's salary
>reduction! AND IF YOU EVER DISOBEY ONE OF MY ORDERS AGAIN, I'M FIRING YOUR
ASS! You won't EVER pilot a labor again!"

>
"But-" Ohta started.
>
"NO BUTS! I've HAD it with your constant excuses. Policemen do NOT fire
>first. Policemen do NOT casually destroy private property. And, most
especially, policemen do NOT DISOBEY ORDERS!"
>
Gotoh casually strolled up. "I don't suppose there's anything I can do to
>help?"

>Gomioka didn't even look at Gotoh before turning away with a snort of
disgust. "If he's unwilling to see reason, I've had it with him. He's
>dismissed." With that, he marched stiffly into the building's office space,
his fists clenched angrily. His stomach burned painfully, but he had no
>choice but to ignore it.

>Gotoh sighed. "So, what happened?"

>Ohta shook his head. "I've got no idea. I was in action against some
Doshkas and Brochens. He ordered me to discontinue action with the Doshkas
>and allow a team of our military labors to deal with them. I asked if I
could continue with the Doshka until the military team arrived, and my
>request was denied. However, before I got a response it was too late- I was
already engaged with one. I tried to tell him this, but he refused to
>listen to me."

>Gotoh shrugged. "Well, considering how often you've opened fire in
disregard of posted orders, some of that is justified. But he seemed a lot
>more upset than he should have been, considering things worked out all
right."
>
Ohta frowned. "I think he's having some medical problems. I saw

him

>fingering a pill bottle while he was lecturing me."

>"Ah, ulcers," Gotoh said knowingly. "Well, he's been under a lot of stress
lately. That's to be expected. Try not to upset him- he'll likely blow up

>a bit more than usual."

>Ohta nodded. "Captain... can he really fire me?"

>Gotoh shook his head. "Not really- that's not in his power. But he can
assign you to drive a transport or to run the command car if he wants,

>provided he has someone he can replace you with in your labor."

>"I don't want to be anything but a labor pilot, sir," Ohta said.

"Unless I
could get a promotion, that is."

>
Gotoh shrugged. "I don't think you're in much danger of that, yet. But try

>and stay on Gomioka's good side, or you'll be in a lot of trouble very
 soon."

>
* * * * *

>
Gotoh stepped into the office quietly, glancing around. Spying Shinobu

>alone, he asked, "Is Gomioka here?"

>She shook her head. "No, why?"

>"No reason," he said, moving further into the office comfortably.

"Just
curious."

>
Shinobu smirked up at him. "Well, I offered Seiroku the job, and he turned

>me down. Seems he feels some sense of loyalty to Mr. Gomioka!"

>Gotoh frowned. "Is that so?"

>"Don't believe me?"

>Gotoh shook his head. "You, I believe. But I found out a few things about
Mr. Seiroku which make me not trust him entirely. Here, take a look at

>this...."

>Shinobu took the file he handed her and opened it. Spying the name on the
front, her eyes widened. "Isn't this the man who killed-"

>
"No. But he's the younger brother of that man. And it seems Mr. Seiroku

>USED to be this man... until he changed his name- legally, as it turns out.
Just to cover his tracks further, he put a few white lies on his application

>form to the police so that he could get in without that stigma attached to
him."

>
Shinobu looked up at Gotoh. There was a darkness to his features that she

>hadn't seen since... since the first time she met him, back when they were
just starting to coin the term 'labor crime' and were investigating what to

>do about it. Back when he had been a victim of one of the first labor
crimes. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

>
Gotoh sighed. "Give him the benefit of the doubt. I've got enough to drum

>him out of the police with his application fraud, but he's too good a cop to
just kick him out just for that. And beyond that, well, we no longer make

>people criminals for what their families do." He paused. "I'm not sure
whether or not I like his refusal to go to Osaka. That could mean one of

>any number of things... but then again, I'm going to be able to keep
an eye
on him while he's here."
>
Shinobu nodded, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "If something
happens,
>though... remember there are people here for you this time."

>-----
Author's Notes: Some of the details
mentioned in here about Gotoh's past
>will be portrayed in a future Patlabor: Personal Files, OAV, but
which is
actually mostly irrelevant to the main storyline. I
intend to write\post at
>least the first three OAVs following the completion of season 1
(after
episode 22). At the moment, 10 OAVs are planned, several of
which have
>spoilers for upcoming season 2 and 3 episodes. I intend to write
several of
the OAVs which do not have such spoilers between the
seasons.

>

> desaix@sysnet.net
Sir Desaix, member # 116 of the Knights of the
True Fiancee
> anime fanfics available at

<http://www.geocities.com/zednik.geo/fanfics.htm>
>

19. Episode 19: Unhappy Birthday to You

From: "David A. Tatum"
>To: "David A. Tatum"
Subject: Re: [FFML] [Patlabor][fanfic]
Patlabor: Personal Files, Episode 19
>Date: Wednesday, March 20, 2002 1:23 AM

>
Ya know, if you'd been on the MPPatlaborML (to subscribe, e-mail
> MPPatlaborML-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) you would have seen

this chapter a week ago... along with You're In Charge II, Chapter 1,
> and now Patlabor manga translations. If you don't get the hint that
I'm
 trying to drum up new members (despite the fact I don't own
or mod on
> the list), well... consider this an invite. We could really use
more
 members (only about a dozen or so at the moment).
>
At any rate, here's the fic. Enjoy.
>

>Patlabor: Personal Files

>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum

>Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>

>Episode 19: Unhappy Birthday To You

>March 27, 2000

>

>Noa yawned as Asuma drove them along the highway. "Why'd we have to
leave
so early?"
>

>
He laughed. "It's a five hour drive, and we've got to get there
by eleven.
>You CAN sleep, you know- you aren't the one who's driving."

>

>"I always get a crick in my neck when I sleep in a car," Noa complained.
She glanced at him with some concern. "Are you sure you want to drive all the way, both ways? I DO know how to drive a car, you know, and I DO have a
license. I've even been there before and know the way."

>

>
"I think I'll be okay," he said. "If I ever start to feel tired, I'll find

>a spot to pull over and we'll switch."

>

>"If you insist... but I WILL be driving us back to base tomorrow morning-
you aren't doing this both ways. Are you sure you'll be okay?" she asked.

>"Not just about the driving, but... well, we ARE going to see your father
again. Last time we went, things didn't go so good."

>

>
"No, they didn't. But I promised him I'd show up for this, so we could try

>and, uh, 'reconcile.' Believe it or not, as bad as it was, looking back on
it, our best meeting since my brother killed himself was the time you were

>with me." He paused. "Actually, I'm more worried about how the car will
react to the trip- I haven't been taking very good care of it since joining

>the SV2, and I think I've used it more the past three months or so than I
have since I bought it four years ago."

>

>
Noa beamed at him enthusiastically. "That's okay. I've gotten pretty good

>at fixing things since the mechanics and Sakaki started..." She suddenly
sobered, her voice catching. "And Sakaki started training me. Asuma..."

>what is the SV2 going to be like without him? He was always able to keep us
stable, and it was him who kept Alphonse and the other labors so smoothly

>tuned. I can't believe he's going- he's... well, not quite like a father,
but maybe like an uncle to me!"

>

>
Asuma glanced at her in concern, but quickly turned his attention back to

>the road before he got into an accident. "He's not dying- just retiring. I
'm sure we'll be able to keep in touch with him from time to time. And

>while Shige's a bit, hmm, overenthusiastic at times, he's also an even
better technical mechanic than Sakaki and has been able to keep the other

>people in the squad running smoothly when Sakaki isn't there to hang over
his shoulder."

>

>
Noa nodded. "I know... but I'm still going to miss him a lot."

>

>
"Yeah, well... so am I, but I'm trying to not let it get to me. At least,

>not while he's still with us. He'll be back, anyway- I'm sure of it. Just
like Kanuka has been." Asuma heard Noa yawn loudly. "If you really don't

>want to sleep in the car, then maybe we should stop and get you a
fresh cup
of coffee or something- it sounds as if you're still
having a hard time
>staying awake."

>

>"I am," Noa admitted. "But don't bother. I think I'll just risk
the
cricked neck and take a nap. I need the rest... wake me when
we're about an

>hour away from your father's home, okay?"

>

>* * * * *

>

>Asuma shook his head, recalling that dream Noa had told him about.
It
certainly was perplexing, and incredibly intriguing. He
recalled a similar

>dream he'd had- well, probably not all that similar. Just sort of
the same
theme- he'd had a dream that Noa should have had.

>

>
Recollecting it had been rather fun. Then, just as they were
about to pull

>into the driveway to his father's house, he just had to blow it by
bringing
up Sakaki's retirement again. Well, the retirement party,
really, but that

>was enough to sadden her. And him, too, now that he thought about
it.

>

>It was, perhaps, the perfect thing to think about right before a
visit with
his father. Set the mood just right. The crick in Noa's
neck didn't help

>HER mood, either.

>

>Together, the frustrated pair walked up to the side door and
knocked.
Tsukai opened the door, and gestured for them to enter.
They tumbled in,

>carrying their overnight bags and not looking very happy.

>

>"Just show us to our rooms and leave us alone for a while to freshen
up,"
Noa muttered.

>

>
The butler surreptitiously glanced over at a nearby clock. "I
believe that

>can be arranged. You're in the same rooms as before. The party isn't
for
another half-hour, so you can have until then." He paused.

"Your father,

>however, would like to speak with you beforehand, Asuma."

>

>Asuma sighed. "Of course. Drop my bags off in my room for me, Noa-
I'll
try and get this over with as soon as I can."

>

>
Noa just took his suitcase and muttered, "Yeah, whatever," as
she made her

>way down the hall to the rooms she remembered spending the night in
last
time she was there.

>

>
Asuma grimaced at Tsukai. "Well, lead the way."

>

>
With a flourish, the butler guided Asuma to a room in the middle
of the

>residence. There, accompanied by television screens picturing every room in
>the house (including Noa's room, where she was going through her suitcases
>assembling a fresh outfit), sat Okami Shinohara. Okami was definitely NOT
>happy.
>

>
"So, son. Happy to see that you actually came by," he said, in a tone that
>indicated he was anything but happy.

>

>Asuma frowned at him. Usually, his father waited until after they'd
>formally greeted each other to get upset, but it didn't seem like that was
>the case this time. "I see you're still keeping tabs on everyone in the
>house. Don't you think the cameras in the bathrooms are a bit much?"
>

>
Okami refused to rise to the bait. "Noa seemed to be rather upset when she
>came in, today. I was going to let you in on a little secret, today, but if
>you're not treating that poor girl right then you'll probably never get
>around to using it."

>

>His son snorted. "Since when have I ever cared whether you give me
>something or not? And, just for your information, she is NOT upset because
>of me. A friend of ours is being forced into retirement, and she's a little
>upset about that."
>

>
The elder Shinohara nodded grudgingly. "I'll buy that. However, even if
>she is upset for some other reason, it is YOUR responsibility to make her
>feel happy, again."
>

>
Asuma bent down, getting right into his father's face. "Like you made MOM
>feel happy when she was 'upset?'" he growled.

>

>At that, Okami flinched. "Leave your mother out of this. Or, if you want,
>then at least allow me to tell you what mistakes I made with her without
>arguing every step of the way."

>

>Asuma shook his head. "I may wind up making mistakes with her, but they'll
>be MY mistakes, and on my terms. Noa is different from mother, and if I try
>to treat my girlfriend the way you SHOULD have treated your wife, I'm likely
>to make more mistakes than if I just treated her like she was Noa."
>

>
Okami sighed. "Well, I've tried to warn you, but if you won't listen there'
>s nothing I can do about it."

>

>Asuma backed off suspiciously. "No pressure? No threats? No..."

>

>His voice trailed off as he finally saw what was happening on the monitor
>behind his father. Noa was in the process of stripping off

her clothes, and
>the picture on the screen showed she was just about to unhook her bra.

>

>Asuma had seen Noa in various states of undress before. Once, when she was
fanning herself from the heat while they sat together on the rooftop of SV2
>headquarters, he peaked down her shirt to see that she hadn't been wearing a
bra. They'd gone swimming enough that he'd memorized what she looked like
>in a swimsuit. Recently, she'd exposed quite a bit more of herself to him
than he'd seen before, however- when he'd been giving her a massage after
>the Kana concert, she'd been bareback- all she would have had to do to give
him quite an eyeful would have been to turn over.
>

>
Noa also knew that he was a bit of a peeping tom. Recently, he'd snuck into
>the locker rooms when she was supposed to be changing- that day, however,
she'd been detained by Shige so that they could go over the upcoming
>available dates and times for her mechanics instruction. So, instead of him
catching her in a mild state of undress, she caught him peering around the
>lockers from what he'd thought was a pretty good hiding place.

>

>She'd been good-natured about it at the time. He remembered her berating
him for the dream she'd just had, because it involved him peeping on her
>(and, Asuma realized, he would probably never hear anyone again say, 'You
made me have wet dreams about myself, you jerk!' in such a good-natured way
>again). She even gave him permission to watch her 'if he could catch her.'
>
However, he hadn't had a good opportunity to see more than she was intending
>to show in a while, and the interesting placement of this camera view was
giving him a much better shot than he'd likely have seen from the hiding
>spot he'd found in the locker room.

>

>Asuma's father, however, was completely unaware of the events transpiring on
the television screen behind him. He just figured that the boy had run out
>of his current supply of vitriol, and was waiting for some kind of response
before resuming the attack.
>

>
"I'm not going to fight you this time, son," he said. "It is your birthday,
>after all, and I want to at least try and remain civil. So just go, freshen
up, and get ready for your party."
>

>
Asuma averted his eyes before Noa gave him the unintended surprise birthday
>present of a rather spectacular (in his mind) view. He might like to peep,
but he was honest about it- if there was no way for him to get caught, then
>it didn't seem fair to the girl he was peaking at.

>

>"Uh, right, pops. I'd better get going now- see you later." He

rushed out,
not looking back.

>

>
"That was odd," Okami remarked before turning around and seeing what it was

>that had really chased his son from the room. He smiled appreciatively for
a moment- she might not have the movie-star standards of most of the women

>he dealt with in high society, but for someone like his son she wasn't bad
looking at all. However, he was quick to flip the switch that gave the girl

>her privacy- that particular sight was one which really should be reserved
for his son, alone.

>

>
* * * * *

>

>
Asuma knocked on the door to Noa's room and waited. A few minutes later,

>she opened it, a big grin on her face.

>

>"You didn't try to peak this time? It WAS safe to, you know," she said,
almost laughing. Catching him in the locker room was fresh in her mind, and

>while she did give him permission to peak on her (sort of- she wasn't sure
what she'd really do if she caught him) she had warned him that if he caught

>her with another girl in that situation, he would be in very big trouble.
For that reason, it was 'dangerous' for him to try and catch her unawares in

>the locker room or bathrooms, since there was a high probability that one of
the other girls would be present. This was his first chance since then.

>

>
"No," he said shortly, thinking back to a few minutes ago.

>

>
Noa leaned in, looking at him closely. Her smile grew in size and

>deviousness. "Were you tempted?"

>

>"You have no idea," he muttered under his breath. "You about ready to go?
My father's ordering us to lunch."

>

>
She glanced down to make doubly sure she looked okay. "Yeah, I'm ready."

>

>
"Let's go, then," he said. As he lead her out of the room and took her arm

>to help guide her, he smirked. "Don't think you're completely safe, though,
even though I haven't tried yet. I have your permission, now, after all."

>

>
* * * * *

>

>
The lunch started out as a rather quiet affair. Asuma and Okami were

>shooting dark glances at each other across the table, and Noa didn't quite
know what to say. Thankfully, someone joined them who helped to open up the

>discussion.

>

>"Well, happy birthday, Asuma! It's wonderful to see you here,"
Jitsuyama,
following Tsukai into the room, proclaimed jovially.
There was a slight
>emphasis on the word 'here.'
>

>"Jitsuyama!" Asuma crowed, an honest smile breaking out on his face.
"I had
no idea you were planning to come by."
>

>
"And miss your birthday party? Hardly!" the elderly plant
engineer laughed.
>"Sorry I'm late, sir."

>

>Okami waved a hand dismissively. "What kept you?"

>

>"Minor accident on the assembly line," Jitsuyama said, sitting down
at the
table.
>

>
"Was anyone hurt?" Noa asked, concerned.
>

>
"How much damage did the plant suffer?" was the elder
Shinohara's
>simultaneous question.

>

>"It turned out to just be a piece of cloth jammed into one of the
conveyer
belts. We were able to get it out with no damage and
little time lost, but
>then I had to file all the necessary reports and things." Nodding to
Noa,
he added, "And no, no-one was hurt."
>

>
Asuma snorted. "Typical of you to worry more about the equipment
than the
>people, pop."

>

>Okami opened his mouth to respond, but shut it again with a snap. "I
said I
didn't want to fight with you today, son, so I won't. I
think a change of
>subject is in order, don't you?"

>

>Asuma just nodded, returning to his food without comment. Noa looked
from
him to his father in concern, but said nothing. Jitsuyama
decided to push
>the conversation forward- though he thought it best if he not direct
his
attention to the fueding family members.
>

>
"Well, Noa, I wasn't expecting to see you here. How'd you get an
invite?"
>he asked with only slightly forced enthusiasm.

>

>Noa smiled a little, glad for the distraction. "Well, Asuma and I
had to
come by a few weeks ago on a case, so I got to meet his
father, and... well,
>I could hardly miss my partner's birthday celebration, could I?"

>

>Jitsuyama smiled. "Of course not. How are things going out there in
the
SV2? We haven't seen much of your unit's labors, recently."

>

>
Noa winced. "Well, we've been out of major action, recently,
thanks to my

>having been injured recently in a non-labor-related incident. We've had
some minor cases, but nothing which resulted in any damage to Alphonse."

>

>
"Oh? What happened to you?"

>

>
"Interdepartmental softball game," Asuma answered for her. His hands

>tightened around the water glass he was holding as he recounted the story
for his father and family friend. Everyone in the room could see his anger

>against the riot squad rising as he remembered how she was injured. They
could also see, just as clearly, how he was almost

>instantaneously calmed by

>Noa's gentle grasp on his shoulder.

>

>"He stayed with me the whole time I was in the hospital," she added
wistfully after he had finished. "He used up a lot of his accumulated leave

>time to do it, as well- he's lucky he had enough to come here today."

>

>Okami clucked his teeth, and Asuma braced himself for the reprimand he was
sure would come. In fact, he could hear the lecture in his head already-

>that he shouldn't have 'neglected his duties to his job' to be with her
while she recovered. No words of reproach left the elder man's mouth,

>however. Instead, he directed his attention to Noa, herself.

>

>"I'm amazed that, after all the action you've been in, it was just a simple
softball game that sent you to the hospital," Asuma's father began briskly.

>

>
She smiled pleasantly at him. "Well, sir, you've built your labors well.

>Alphonse, my Ingram, has protected me well, even after having been nearly
ripped apart in some actions." Noa shuddered as she recalled her first

>major action against the Griffon, and the near nervous breakdown that
incident had caused. "Your son's done a good job of watching my back, as

>well. He's saved me from certain disaster quite a number of times."

>

>Jitsuyama shook his head. "I remember seeing some of those incidents on the
news- it's scary how much action you've seen at such a young age."

>

>
Okami nodded. "Yes- I especially recall the incidents involving the

>Griffin. I've seen the tapes, but what was it like to engage in combat
against that remarkable machine?"

>

>
Asuma sniffed. "Trying to get some insight into your competition, dad?"

>

>
"No, Asuma," his father replied, rolling his eyes. "I've got all the

>statistical data I might need on the Griffin. I'm just trying to make
conversation- don't be so defensive!"

>

>
Noa sighed. Really, this father-son conflict was too much, but both of them

>had points, sometimes. However, this was one time which, largely because of
her personal experiences, she knew some of Asuma's bitterness was deserved-

>after all, where was his father when he needed him, then? "Can we talk
about something else, please?" she asked. "The Griffin incidents were..."

>not pleasant memories for me. I wouldn't think they'd be for you, either,
Mr. Shinohara- your son was nearly killed by the thing."

>

>
"He was?" he said, sounding genuinely surprised. "How?"

>

>
Noa blinked. "You mean you don't know? How he got into a fight with the

>Griffin while he was testing the earliest prototype of your economy-model
Ingram? How he was battered around in the thing until his ribs were broken?

>How he went to the hospital and..." her voice broke. "Well, it was a hard
time for all of us in the SV2. But I'm still surprised you didn't know

>about that."

>

>Okami's eyes flashed at Jitsuyama, but the elder plant chief just shrugged.
"No, I hadn't heard. I was aware our economy Ingram had been trashed by the

>thing, but I didn't know that was the reason why. I wasn't even aware Asuma
had been piloting the thing."

>

>
"I had to see if it could stand up to the rigors of police work," Asuma

>explained. "I discovered it was just a piece of junk- the whole thing
started falling apart from the inside the moment I had to use it with any

>speed."

>

>Okami frowned. "Is that why you asked for the SV2 to be made test pilots
for the improved economy model?"

>

>
Noa looked over at Asuma in surprise- she hadn't been aware that he'd

>arranged for that. In fact, she didn't know he COULD arrange for something
like that. He and his father had still been estranged at the time.

>

>
"I suppose you could say that, yes," Asuma nodded. "I figured that if Noa

>felt that the labor was good enough to replace her Alphonse, then it might
be worthwhile adopting the economy model. To be honest, I don't think even

>the Peacemakers could have beaten her in that competition you arranged,
afterwards."

>

>
Okami shrugged. "From what I know of the battle with the Griffin, I must

>agree. Tell me, Ms. Izumi, what is your background in labor piloting

prior
to joining the Patlabor division of the police?"

>

>
"Background? I'd never actually piloted a labor, before," Noa said. "I'd

>always wanted to, however, and it seemed like a good way of doing it. I
worked as a meter maid to send myself to the academy, and it wasn't until I

>got to Fuji I had any training at all. I had about 40 hours worth of labor
time in simulations and training labors when I first started piloting

>Alphonse..."

>

>He looked at her in surprise. "Really? I'm amazed that someone like you
would get an opportunity to pilot a patlabor with no prior experience..."

>

>
Noa frowned, not liking how that sounded. "What to you mean 'someone like

>me?'"

>

>The elder Shinohara shrugged. "A mere slip of a girl like you-combat
labors weren't designed with people like you in mind. Why, the mere

>physical demands, alone, are more than most women should have to endure."

>

>Noa grit her teeth. "You mean, just because I'm a girl, I shouldn't be
piloting Patlabors?"

>

>
Okami shook his head. "No, no, no- you misunderstand me. Well, you're

>partially right, but that's not what I meant. When we were calibrating the
tests for combat labors, such as your Ingram, we had a default model for the

>pilot which did not include feminine body types. We simply weren't
expecting women to pilot them."

>

>
"But women were piloting MILITARY labors, then! I know- I've met some of

>them. And unit 1's captain is a woman, and she was one of the first
Patlabor pilots! Why wouldn't you expect women to pilot labors?" Noa

>exclaimed.

>

>Jitsuyama, Tsukai, and Asuma all shared glances of equal dismay. They knew
where this was headed, and couldn't think of how to head it off.

>

>
"Dad, don't-" Asuma tried to say.

>

>
Ignoring his son, the elder Shinohara answered, "Well, isn't it obvious?

>Piloting labors, combat, fighting, making arrests- those are all mens work.
Women in the police aren't really supposed to be anything other than meter

>maids-"

>

>There was a loud snapping sound as Noa stiffened so quickly that the crick
in her neck popped. "And why is that?" she said evenly.

>

>
"Well, imagine if you got yourself hurt? A woman's prospects for marriage
>would be GONE, just like that, if something happened! Why-"

>

>"DAD!" Asuma bellowed, interrupting the argument and bolting out of his
chair. "THIS is why we get into so many fights. Have you forgotten that
>this is now the 21st century? Do you even know what you're SAYING?! Why-"

>

>"No, Asuma," Noa said coolly, laying a hand on his shoulder and forcing him
back into his seat. "Your father is entitled to his opinions. Which, as it
>turns out, mirrors my father's as well. My father didn't want me to get a
job in labors, either." With determination, she picked up her chopsticks
>and started eating. "And I can ignore him, just like I do my own dad. So
hurry up and finish eating- it's easier to ignore someone if you can walk
>away from them when they start acting stupidly."

>

>Asuma settled down, but continued to glare at his father as he rapidly
(though civilly) devoured his birthday lunch. Noa finished shortly before
>he did, and she stood up. "I've got something I've got to do- can you come
help me, Asuma?"
>

>
Asuma just nodded, pausing to send one last angry look at his father before
>scrambling out of the room after her- like, most of those present would have
noted in more pleasant circumstances, a puppy dog following its master.
>

>
Jitsuyama and Tsukai both turned harsh eyes towards the Shinohara patriarch
>as well. He had the grace to look a little embarrassed. "Oops," he said.
"I seem to have offended the girl."
>

>
Tsukai said nothing, just turning and leaving the room without a word.
>Jitsuyama, on the other hand...

>

>"'Offended the girl' you say! Talk about the understatement of the year,"
he snapped. "You shouldn't antagonize people like that- doing it to your
>own son is bad enough. But to his friends!? And what was she doing here,
anyway? I understood this was a family gathering, only."

>

>
"She is family," Okami replied.
>

>
"Is she? How?" the engineer asked curiously.
>

>
"Well, they've been dating for a few months, now," Okami replied. "I was
>going to let Asuma know that I'd arranged a dowry for her with her parents,
so he could go ahead and ask her if he was thinking about-"

>

>
"WHAT?!" Jitsuyama bellowed, erupting out of his seat much like Asuma had
>done, earlier. "Do you know just how much trouble everyone in the entire
Tokyo Police department- and the SV2 in particular- have gone through to
>keep their relationship officially a secret? Everyone knows, those two are
the best damned tandem team in the entire world when it comes to operating a
>Patlabor, and so all the 'evidence' of their relationship is ignored. But
if word came out that a dowry had been arranged, do you KNOW what would
>happen? Internal Affairs couldn't just sweep that under the rug- it would
have to investigate. And the investigation would easily show that they were
>having some kind of relationship that would be forbidden in the bylaws of
the force. They'd be separated, at best- more likely, thrown off the force
>altogether. Both of their names would be smeared across the papers- not
just because he's your son, but because they ARE known as the most effective
>team in all of SV2... which, as you are no doubt aware, doesn't have much of
a reputation to begin with. Their lives would be ruined. And, if that
>isn't enough to make you realize just how dangerous that is, if THEY were
caught up in this scandal, then the entire Patlabor program is likely to
>crumble. Which means we lose possibly the most lucrative contract in the
country."
>

>
Okami blinked up at his chief plant engineer, stunned that the man would
>have the audacity to speak to him that way. Then he thought about what the
man was saying, and sighed. "Relax, old friend. It's not as bad as you
>think- both I and Noa's father know enough to keep it a secret. Only he, I,
and my lawyer knows. And my lawyer only knows because I had to change my
>will." He paused. "Asuma's getting everything when he marries her. But
not until he marries her, even if I pass on before then. We even worked it
>out so that inheritance laws aren't a concern if they don't marry before I'm
dead- and they'll still be able to keep it a secret."

>

>
Jitsuyama frowned. "I still don't like it..."
>

>
"And if it's officially such a 'secret,' how do you know about their
>relationship, anyway?" Okami asked, grinning.

>

>"How do YOU know?" the engineer shot back.

>

>"They told me. Now answer my question."

>

>Jitsuyama was startled by that answer. "They... TOLD you? They admitted
it?"
>

>
"The girl did, specifically."
>

>
Jitsuyama whistled. "I never thought that would happen. I figured they'd
>elope on you, first- if they started admitting it at all. How long ago was
this? Officer Yoriko, one of the traffic cops in Bokuto province, has been
>running a betting pool for how long it would take for them to realize they
liked each other. I had Valentines Day of this year...."
>

>
Okami blinked. "Just... how widespread is their 'secret'?"

>

>
Jitsuyama laughed. "Well, everyone knows they like each other. That's
>never been in question- I suspect even the commissioner himself knows, he
just chooses to ignore it so that no action is taken against them. The
>unofficial official position on it is, 'we all know it's happening, but
there's no proof so we'll just ignore it.' I imagine it's being kept secret
>on several levels. Only they know how far they've really gone, together,
exactly, but I suspect outside of them you're on the closest tier to knowing
>the 'truth' about them, since you have their admission. And you're trying
to keep it all a secret, of course. Then there's the immediate friends and
>associates who weren't entrusted with this information- people like their
teammates in the SV2. They don't KNOW anything, outside of the obvious-
>they like each other- but they definitely have their suspicions. And, of
course, they won't say anything, either. Then there's the people who just
>know the rumors, but they, of course, won't risk telling their superiors-
for one thing, everyone LIKES them, and for another... well, it's just a
>rumor, after all. They don't have any proof. Of course, the superiors
aren't clueless, they have ears- but they only hear the rumors secondhand,
>in bits and pieces. And, well, why would they act on secondhand rumors
about something they don't have any real solid evidence about? So they
>never say anything, either..."

>

>"So, what you're saying is, everyone knows," Shinohara chuckled.

>

>"Well, all of Tokyo does, at least."

>

>"Does my son know all of this?"

>

>Jitsuyama shrugged. "I dunno. He probably knows that there are rumors
about him and Noa- after all, one time one of his teammates accused him of
>getting the poor girl pregnant! That, though, I can guarantee was before
anything had actually happened between them, so obviously his accuser was
>wrong. Still, he has to be aware of some of it...."

>

>"If everyone knows, why do they bother with the secrecy?" Okami asked,
puzzled. As sad as it was, even he had to admit that

Jitsuyama probably
>would understand Asuma's reasoning better than he would. After
all,
Jitsuyama was the one who always babysat the boy whenever he
took him into
>work- which was quite often.

>

>"As I said, there's no proof yet. If they came out and admitted it
to their
superiors, well... Internal Affairs would have to
investigate, no question
>there. And I already told you what would happen then...."

>

>Shinohara sighed. Then he perked up. "Well, it sounds as if
this...
Yoriko, was it? Yoriko's pool is done with. How about I
start another one.
>How long do you think it will be before they get new jobs so they
can become
more open with there relationship, anyway?"
>

>
Jitsuyama thought about it and grinned. "Well, Asuma's pretty
stubborn
>about things, but once he's made a decision he'll work relentlessly
towards
achieving it. He's also a reluctant romantic, as well.
It's a bit of a
>toss-up between February 14th and March 14th next year, for me, but
knowing
him...."
>

>
* * * * *
>

>
Asuma sighed as the door to the dining room closed behind them.
"Sorry
>about that, Noa," he apologized. "Bringing you here was obviously a
bad
idea."
>

>
Noa shrugged. "Don't worry about it. Like I said back there,
he's just
>like my own father. I can't tell you the number of times my dad
objected to
my career in labors, because 'if you get one injury,
it's over for you!'"
>She shook her head in disgust. "I just want to take a nice, long
bath to
relieve the stress."
>

>
Asuma ducked into the hallway that their rooms were in,
following on Noa's
>heels. "Yeah. I need some time to recover, as well- we've got to
deal with
dad for both dinner tonight and breakfast tomorrow."

>

>
Noa went into her room, but then paused. She glanced over at
Asuma, an
>unreadable expression on her face. "They're wrong, aren't they?"

>

>Asuma blinked, joining her. "Eh? Who? What?"

>

>"If I get one injury, it won't be over for me, will it?" she asked.
"You'll
stick with me, won't you?"
>

>
Asuma nodded. "I'm not quite ready to say 'til death do we part'
just yet,
>but essentially that's what I feel right now."

>

>She grinned. "Thank you, Asuma. I needed to hear that." To reward him for
his declaration, she pulled him close and started kissing him.

>

>
They'd been doing this a lot, recently. Especially since March 14th, or

>White Day, when Asuma presented her with a rather impressive array of
chocolates. As it turns out, it was later in that day she'd first caught

>him trying to peep on her... and, for some reason, that had made Noa even
more decisive in their relationship, taking any opportunity for a make-out

>session she could find. Which wasn't really that often, since it was so
hard to find enough privacy, but she was definitely upping their

>relationship a bit- and was upping it even more, now. For the first time,
Noa was guiding Asuma's hands, sliding them under her shirt and up far

>enough that he could feel the lace in her bra.

>

>It was... enjoyable, that much was certain. But, unfortunately, Asuma was
all too aware of their surroundings. Once he remembered where they were and

>what they were doing, he pull his lips- and his hand- away. "Not now," he
whispered hoarsely. "We can't do this now."

>

>
Noa's eyes opened, and she glared at him. She didn't really want to go all

>the way- just to play around a bit- but she would never have expected him to
just turn her down like this. "Why not?!" she growled, stamping her foot in

>frustration.

>

>Asuma would have laughed at the picture of Noa, looking like a petulant
child demanding to know why her toy had been taken away, if he had not felt

>the same desperation. "Not here. My father has cameras in this room- and
our bathrooms. I've seen his monitor room- earlier today, too- and I

>couldn't find anywhere in this house, or on the surrounding grounds, he
can't see from there. I don't want him to have a free show of the two of

>us."

>

>Noa reined in her hormones- she was all primed for a good make-out session,
but it seemed she wouldn't be able to have one of those right now. "I guess

>we'll have to wait... but now it looks like I'll need a shower. Feels like
you might need one, too- a cold one."

>

>
Asuma glanced down, noticed the bulge in his trousers, and blushed. "Eep!"

>he screeched, dashing off in the direction of his bathroom. With a grin on
her face, Noa turned and went into her own.

>

>
'I guess I can turn him on, after all. I was beginning to wonder about

>that,' she thought.

>-----

>Note: Noa's dream, and the whole 'peeking' incident, are both to be
>recounted in an upcoming OAV. Remember, however, that the OAVs aren't going
>to be started until after episode 22 (and then I think I'll do 4 of them, or
>roughly 1/3 of those planned so far. None of those 4, by the way, will be
>for this incident... as that'll have spoilers for Season 2! Heheheh!
(Am I
>evil, or what? Uh, never mind, don't answer that.)

>
>Next Episode: Kanuka heads off for her assignment to the Academy, Unit 2 in
>tow. By the time Gotoh returns to headquarters, however, crime is on the
>rampage and the rest of the SV2 is falling apart.

>
>-----
>David A. Tatum
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20. Episode 20: Running Rampant

From: "David A. Tatum"

>To:
>Subject: [MPPatlaborML] [fanfic] Patlabor: Personal Files, Episode 20

>Date: Monday, April 01, 2002 5:39 PM

>Well, lotsa foreshadowing for season 2 (episodes 23-44) here. Enjoy.

>
>Patlabor: Personal Files

>
>An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum

>
>Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

>

>
>Episode 20: Running Rampant

>
>April 1, 2000

>

>
>Shinshi walked into Kanuka's dorm room, watching her as she finished

>packing. She looked over at him, surprised- he wasn't usually one to come
>by unexpected.

>

>
>"Can I help you?" she asked.

>

>
>"There's no chance I can convince you to stay here and command Ohta, is

>there?" he asked wearily.

>

>
>Kanuka smirked. "You're on your own for that one from now on. Sorry."

>

>
>Shinshi sighed. "I sometimes wonder if I'm really cut out for this job.
>But if I quit, I'm sure Tamiko would be annoyed."

>

>
>"You've dealt with Ohta before, you can do it again. But I get the feeling

>you're not down here just to ask me to stay." Kanuka asked.

>

>
>Shinshi nodded. "Yeah- actually, I'm acting as Gotoh's messenger boy. He
>wanted me to let you know Unit 2 is going to accompany you down to the

>Academy. He said something about wanting to give the new recruits

a demonstration of 'professional Patlabor skills,' but I got the feeling there
>was more to it than that."

>

>Kanuka raised an eyebrow. "Hmm. Well, I'll figure it out when I get down
there... is he offering a ride?"
>

>
Shinshi laughed. "Actually, they want you to help drive. They're taking
>all three Ingrams with them, and were hoping you'd take the third command
car. Gotoh agreed to loan the Academy Labor 3 for the coming semester, with
>the provision that Fuji use its budget to pay for it's restoration to
servicable condition and maintenance during that period. Anyway, that's all
>I came down to say, except for Unit 3's farewell party is commencing in
about 20 minutes. I know you hate these things, but at least we didn't
>break into your apartment to host it, this time."

>

>Kanuka turned a dark look on him. "Yes, I still remember that time. And I
am still not very happy about it...."
>

>
Shinshi swallowed. "Uh, yeah. See ya soon, ma'am," he said quickly,
>darting out of the room as fast as his feet allowed.

>

>"Curiouser and curiouser," Kanuka said to herself in English. "Why does
Gotoh want me to have a patlabor at Fuji?"
>

>
* * * * *
>

>
"Hmm. This is a lot more comfortable than the last time I rode with you in
>the command car," Noa commented, stretching her legs in the relatively roomy
seats of the car's cabin.
>

>
"There aren't any insane mechanics trying to kill me for percieved slights
>to their idols, this time around," Asuma noted dryly. "Did you come up with
an official excuse for joining me here as opposed to Hiromi in the labor
>transport?"

>

>Noa nodded. "Yeah. Hiromi said he'd help us out by taking some spare seeds
from our vegetable gardens as a gift for one of the instructors in Fuji
>which would take up my seat in the transport." She paused. "I dunno if
anyone will even ask, though. Hiromi and Takeo knew just from watching us
>that we were going out, and you say that Gotoh's been giving us strange
looks now and then. Joudo suspects something, I think, and even Natsume
>seems to understand about us. And, well, I wouldn't put anything past
Kanuka...."
>

>
"I suppose we really only need to worry about our 'public displays of
>affection' when we're with the gang," Asuma agreed. "I still worry, though.
Even if our friends are willing to ignore it, if they

accidentally let
>something slip I'm pretty sure Internal Affairs would have our hides
tied up
in an investigation faster than we could blink. And you'll
never believe
>who just got put on the Internal Affairs review board."

>

>"Who?" Noa asked, curious.

>

>"Captain Takada Toshinori."

>

>Noa frowned. "Who's he?"

>

>Asuma grimaced. "I think you'd remember, since it was under his
orders
that one of the members of the riot squad sent you to the
hospital...."
>

>
"Him?" Noa said, shifting uncomfortably on her seat. "Well, that
was just a
>silly softball game, and it happened months ago. Surely he's
forgotten
about it by now... and even if he hasn't, why would he
hold a grudge against
>us?"

>

>Asuma shrugged. "I met him when he came by to deliver an 'official
apology'
to you at the hospital- you were in surgery at the time,
though. He never
>returned, either... and I'm glad. I never met someone so...
vindictively
cold in my entire career in the SV2. I'm afraid that
he WOULD hold a grudge
>against Captain Gotoh, at least, and the scandal that he could raise
over
any investigation into our relationship would be a perfect
weapon for him.
>He wouldn't care what other damage he caused, as long as he got
the
Captain."
>

>
"Oh," Noa replied quietly. She contemplated what that might mean
to them,
>and found herself vaguely disappointed. "I suppose we need to be
especially
careful while we're at the Academy, huh?"
>

>
Asuma smiled bitterly. "Pretty much. We need to be more careful,
period-
>we don't want any rumors getting into the wrong hands. I guess we
need to
cool things down for a while when we're on the job. Our
next vacation time
>doesn't come until May, unfortunately, so it looks like we may have
to wait
a while before we can 'indulge' in each other, again."

>

>
Noa huffed. "I don't like it- things were just getting
interesting!"
>

>
Asuma coughed, straining against his surprise at her bluntness
to hold onto
>control of the car. 'interesting' was a very unusual way of putting
it.
Things had been getting a bit steamy between them- their
make-out sessions
>had started including a little more risque carressing- at first,
some clumsy
grope through their clothing, but the way things were
moving they'd have

>started removing a few pieces of those clothing pretty soon.
Unfortunately,
this seemed to shove a monkey wrench into things.

>

>
"Uh, yeah, they were," he admitted, clearing his throat. "I hate it, too,

>but what are our options? Are you willing to risk losing your job-
and
Alphonse- just for more necking sessions?"

>

>
"No," Noa replied, defeated. "But in May, you and I are going somewhere

>fun, just the two of us, alone. And we'll see if we can't make up
for the
time we'll have lost, okay?"

>

>
"Deal," Asuma agreed.

>

>
* * * * *

>

>
Chief Sakuma, Commandant of Fuji's Special Vehicles Academy,
stepped up to

>the small convoy after the contingent of police officers had
finished
parking. The incoming freshmen for the semester that was
about to begin had

>assembled in formation behind him, standing at attention. When Gotoh
left
his car, he stepped up to him.

>

>
By the time Sakuma reached Gotoh, much of the rest of the second
unit had

>managed to park and swarm over to their Captain. Sakuma, however,
ignored
them. Saluting Gotoh, he said, "Hello, Captain. Welcome
back to Fuji."

>

>
Gotoh returned the salute lazily. "Chief Sakuma. Any promising
students

>trying out for Section 2 this year?"

>

>"Yes, yes. Of course. There's one incoming freshman, though, who
might be
a bit of a troublemaker. I think I'd better call your
attention to her,

>right away."

>

>"Oh?" Gotoh said, not sounding the least bit surprised. "Is that so?
Well,
let's see this troublemaker!"

>

>
"Of course," Sakuma said. "Cadet Mahoko! Front and center!"

>

>
A young girl, her long hair tied up in a bun, darted forward, a
huge grin on

>her face. "Cadet Mahoko GOTOH, reporting for duty, SIR!" she
said,
saluting.

>

>
Gotoh, his face expressionless, saluted his niece back... this
time with a

>lot more conviction. He turned to the chief. "So, this is
your
troublemaker?"

>

>
Sakuma stifled his laughter to reply. "Yes, that she is. Her
uncle was a

>pupil of mine, once, and she's bound to give me at least as many

ulcers as
he did." He grinned at Mahoko. "At ease."
>

>
Laughing herself, Mahoko launched herself at her uncle, circling her arms
>around his neck in a big hug. "Hi, Uncle Gotoh!"

>

>Curling his lip up affectionately, Gotoh gave her a one-armed hug back.
"Hi, Mahoko. How's the first day coming?"
>

>
Around them, the entire unit he commanded gaped. "So, THIS is why he
>insisted on coming along," Kanuka muttered.

>

>"And here I was, afraid he was bringing us with him because he suspected
something dangerous was going on," Asuma added, grinning slightly at the
>scene before him.

>

>Noa, who was still upset at having lost three weeks of being able to make
out with Asuma (for, while they had just agreed to cool things off a bit,
>they were still going to be able to kiss when they got back), frowned.
"Why'd he have to bring us with him, then?"
>

>
Asuma just placed a hand on her shoulder and squeezed reassuringly- a
>comforting gesture to let her know he regretted the lost time, too, but also
reminding her not to get upset over it.
>

>
"Heh," Joudo snorted to himself- out of Noa and Asuma's hearing- with a
>half-smirk. "Well, I've seen drunken officers on duty in our unit, I've
seen procedural violation that would send the police commissioner into a
>heart attack, I've seen our captain hitting on another captain, I've seen
two member of Labor 1's team participate in a forbidden relationship, and
>I've seen mechanics sabotaging the crew's vehicles... I'm honestly surprised
it took this long for me to see my first case of nepotism."
>

>
Takeo, Natsume, and Hiromi remained quiet, although Natsume kept looking
>between her captain and Mahoko in confusion.

>

>"What's the matter," Joudo finally asked.

>

>Natsume blinked up at him owlishly. "I don't recall ever seeing Captain
Gotoh look at anyone like that before."
>

>
Joudo shrugged. "Well, we've never seen him around family before, either,
>have we?"

>

>Natsume tapped her chin cutely, squinting her eyes as she thought hard.
"No, I guess we haven't."
>

>
Joudo looked to where Asuma was holding Noa's shoulder in such a familiar
>matter, then back to Natsume's cute 'thinking' pose. 'Hmm,' he

thought to
himself. 'If they don't mind ONE couple in this unit, why would they mind
>two? And it's not like Captain Gotoh can complain, as much as he pursues
one of HIS fellow officers...."

>

>
That train of thought was abruptly ended when Gotoh snapped an order at

>Kanuka. "Luitenant Clancy, front and center."

>

>With the ever-present disciplined fierceness she always exuded, Kanuka
strode forward and faced the captain with hardly a glint of unusual emotions

>in her eyes. "Yes, sir!"

>

>"This is my niece, Mahoko. Though you will know her as Cadet Gotoh," he
noted, gesturing to the young girl who was smiling up at him.

>

>
Kanuka patiently kept herself from rolling her eyes or commenting on how she

>had already heard that part- after all, she knew Gotoh was much brighter
than he often let on. "I see, sir."

>

>
"Now, I'm not going to ask you to show her any favoritism. Not only is it

>against the rules, but I'm pretty sure I'd just get her angry if I did," he
explained. "However, she's like a daughter to me, and I hope you'll keep

>track of her progress and let me know how she's doing from time to time."

>

>Kanuka nodded. "Very well, sir, I think a limited degree of feedback would
be acceptable."

>

>
Gotoh smiled happily- a very strange expression on his face.

"Good. We'll

>be on hand until the Twentieth, however, to provide experienced guidance in
these first few weeks. Now, how about we unload those Ingrams and show

>these cadets what REAL Patlabors handle like?"

>

>* * * * *

>

>April 11, 2000

>

>Gotoh checked over the papers he had assigned to the cadets he had been
mentoring. Few of them took him seriously, it appeared... though he was

>pleased to see his niece was not one of those people. Gotoh sighed- well,
that was to be expected. Most people desperately tried to avoid service in

>Section 2 with the Patlabors- their reputation was... not the best. Most
people at Fuji were in training to join Special Vehicles

Section 1- Fire and

>Rescue. Section 3, the military, had a separate training facility, but a
few reserve units also trained alongside the other Special Vehicles teams.

>Patlabor candidates were few and far between, it seemed, despite the
increasing demand for new officers as new units were established.

>

>
Asuma, Noa in tow, had taken a few select cadets and was attempting to
>provide them with additional instruction. Hiromi had apparently sequestered
himself in with the groundskeepers at Fuji, however, as he didn't really
>have much to teach. Joudo and Natsume, both being recent graduates
themselves, were merely catching up with old friends who had been
>underclassmen when they were still in the Academy.

>

>As had happened once before, Takeo and Kanuka had been developing something
of a rivalry in their instruction. Takeo had volunteered to be a guest
>lecturer on standard operating procedures for policework and similar
subjects, and was attempting to show more progress with HER students than
>Kanuka's own assigned classes. All in all, Gotoh was viewing this whole
thing as a favorable venture.
>

>
"Captain Gotoh?" a voice belonging to one of the administrative staff of the
>facility beckoned from the door.

>

>"Yeah?" he replied, not looking up.

>

>"Telephone for you, line 3. It's from a Captain Nagumo."

>

>"Shinobu?" he replied, perking up. "Thank you! I'll take it here.
Dismissed."
>

>
"Yes, sir." The man nodded from the doorway before leaving.

>

>
He picked up the phone, pressing the button to connect him to the proper
>line. "Hi, Shinobu! I've been trying to get in touch with you for days and
haven't been able to get through- what's going on?"

>

>
"Gotoh," her tired-sounding voice replied. "We've been up to our necks in
>action since you've left. All sorts of problems are creeping up, both with
calls and with the third unit- we need you back here, now."
>

>
"What's going on?" Gotoh replied, concerned. Shinobu never sounded this
>worn out, as far as he could remember.

>

>"It's a long story... all I can say is we need you back here as soon as
possible. Any chance you could get back here a little early?"

>

>
Gotoh frowned. This could be any number of things, but if his suspicion was
>correct... "All right, we'll pack up and head on back tomorrow. See you
soon."
>

>
"Thanks, Gotoh," she replied, the relief evident in her voice.

Suddenly, in
>the background, he could hear an alarm going off. "Oh, shit- Gotta
go.
Hurry back soon." With that, the phone disconnected.
>

>
Gotoh blinked at the phone. That didn't sound like Shinobu at
all...
>whatever it was must REALLY be distressing her.

>

>He pressed a button on the intercom. "Yes, sir?" came a new voice
from the
other end.
>

>
"Please inform the commandant that my unit will unexpectedly
have to leave
>tomorrow, and then see to it that my niece comes to my office
pronto. I
want to discuss a few things with her before I go."

>

>
* * * * *
>

>
April 12, 2000
>

>
Noa slipped opposite Asuma into the command car, puffing
slightly as she
>recovered from the rush to finish packing and loading that
Gotoh's
surprisingly frenzied orders to return to their
headquarters that morning
>demanded.

>

>"I think that's the fastest I've ever packed in my life," she
sighed,
buckling her seatbelt.
>

>
Asuma chuckled, doing a last minute check of the instrumentation
of the
>vehicle. "I warned you that you shouldn't pack too much when we came
down
here."
>

>
"I was expecting to be gone for three weeks!" Noa fussed. "And
you could
>have helped me, you know."

>

>"I had my own packing to do," Asuma answered, starting the car and
driving
it out slowly to follow Hiromi and their labor transport..
"And I had to
>let our 'students' know we were leaving, and give them some last
minute
pieces of advice."
>

>
Noa shook her head. "What was it this time? How to hide beer in
a police
>stations refridgerator?"

>

>Asuma shook his head. "Nah, told them about that a couple days
ago."

>

>Noa laughed. "I still can't believe you started their 'lessons' with
that
same lecture you gave me about how daily life is a 'struggle
for survival'
>when I first came to SV2. MOST of these people aren't going to be
sent to
our station, you know- why do you think THEY would need to
learn how to farm
>their own food?"

>

>Asuma sighed. "I know they might go to some other SV2 building, but...
well, I've seen the one at Kanazawa. That one is in an even WORSE position
>than we are- they don't even have a restaurant that delivers lunch, OR
someone with as green a thumb as Hiromi. They're located so far away from
>the city, in fact, they can't even make use of a nearby convenience store.
I have NO idea how they keep themselves fed... so I figure it couldn't hurt
>if they knew to expect that kind of thing."

>

>Noa frowned. "When did you ever go to Kanazawa?"

>

>"My first assignment was at the Kanazawa station. They hadn't completed the
labor facility, and we didn't even HAVE a Patlabor at the time. That's
>where I first met Ohta. Then, funding was cut and they decided, instead of
opening stations in Osaka, Kanazawa, and Tokyo, they'd instead just move us
>all to the place we were most needed, and see if we worked out. Funding
came back for those other cities' stations, though, after that whole
>incident with Kai. I remember hearing they were re-opening that old
Kanazawa station, and fearing what that would mean for our fellow labor
>teams."

>

>"Huh, I didn't know that," Noa said. "One of these days, you and I are
going to have to sit down and talk a bit about our pasts. I got you really
>mad, once, because I didn't understand the past between you and your father,
I just knew you were estranged. And I... got SO scared that whatever we
>might have had when I accidentally blurted that whole secret I've kept out
at you about, uh, losing my virginity." Asuma flinched slightly, but didn't
>say anything, so she continued. "I just think it would be better if we let
each other know of anything like that might come up like that."
>

>
Asuma shrugged. "Maybe. I really don't know what else you might want to
>hear about me, though- you already know pretty much everything."

>

>"Oh, really? I haven't heard much about any past girlfriends of yours from
you, though I've heard from certain sources that you've been a bit of a
>ladies man...." Noa teased.

>

>"Well, before you, there was only one serious girl in my life. But she was
way back in high school, and I lost contact with her for so long I hadn't
>known she'd... uh, passed away from heart failure... until over a year after
she'd died."
>

>
Noa frowned thoughtfully. "Was she named 'Kashima' by any chance?"
>

>
Asuma blinked. "Uh, yeah- how did you know?"
>

>
"I think I heard you say her name, once," Noa replied, offhandedly. "Still, even if there weren't any other 'serious' girls in your life, surely there
are other 'less' serious ones?"
>

>
"Well-"
>

>
The radio crackled suddenly. "This is Gotoh. Be advised, we will be exceeding speed limits on this trip. There will be no breaks. If you feel
it necessary, go ahead and sound the siren."
>

>
"Acknowledged," Asuma said into the radio. He shook his head. "Something's gotta be bugging him- Gotoh's been acting funny all day. I wish he'd tell
us what's going on."
>

>
"Maybe he doesn't know," Noa suggested cautiously.
>

>
Asuma nodded. "Yeah, that makes a little sense. He usually at least gives us a hint of what's going on if he knows. And he's telling us to go HOME on
sirens. Something must be upsetting him."
>

>
"It couldn't be something to do with Captain Shinobu, could it?" Noa asked, concerned.

>

>
"Well, if it was just HER, I'm pretty sure he would have gone back himself
as fast as he could, and not worried about keeping us in a convoy. It has to be something where he wants the whole unit together," Asuma supplied.
"Come to think of it, this whole trip seems wierd. When I found out that his niece was attending the Academy, I thought I found the answer, but there
still seemed to be something fishy with his decision to loan out our third labor for a whole semester."

>

>
"A labor at the Academy... heh. Remember when Ohta, Shinshi, and Kanuka
stole that 'original patlabor' to fight off the military during Kai's incident?" Noa laughed, but then frowned. "Come to think of it, they
wrecked that labor! I forgot about that!"
>

>
However, Noa's memory triggered another thought process entirely in Asuma's mind. "Hey, Noa... when Gotoh saw Kai's men watching our station, he made
sure Alphonse was somewhere the bad guys wouldn't think to look, right?"
>

>
Noa nodded. "Yeah... and I never DID thank him for that."

>

>
"What if he's doing the same thing again? Maybe he suspect something serious is about to happen, and is trying to make sure we've got an
emergency labor available, if we need it?"

>

>
Noa thought for a moment. "I dunno... but why isn't he saving Alphonse, if
>so?"

>

>"Maybe he needs Alphonse somewhere else," Asuma answered. "Or maybe he just
doesn't know of a convincing reason to send him out somewhere, alone. But
>if we're rushing home... what if he thinks the danger is INSIDE of SV2?"

>

>Noa blinked. "Asuma, that's ridiculous. Why would he be afraid of US?"

>

>Asuma shook his head. "Not us. At least, not you or me... but one of the
new recruits. And not someone in our unit, or he'd just have taken our team
>up with him to the Academy since he wouldn't want whoever it is to know
where we 'hid' our 3rd labor. No... he thinks there's someone dangerous in
>either Unit 1 or Unit 3. And I have no clue what, but he thinks that they
might be doing something involving our labors!"
>

>
Noa frowned. "I hope you're wrong, Asuma- I like everyone in the station!
>But... I think to be on the safe side, I'm going to start sleeping with
Alphonse."
>

>
Asuma kept himself from wincing by mentally repeating the mantra, 'Alphonse
>is JUST a labor- he is not a human being, and Noa sleeping with him is NOT
tantamount to her cheating on me,' a few times in his head. Finally, he
>answered, "I'm not sure that's a good idea- it's more important that you're
unhurt than Alphonse, and if someone is determined to sabotage our labors,
>he'd probably be willing to do anything to the person guarding it. And... I
couldn't stand it if you hurt yourself like that...."

>

>
Noa nodded. "I'll be careful. But I AM a police officer, and I won't be in
>any more danger than I would be trying to stop any other criminal out
there."
>

>
Asuma sighed. "Well... maybe I'll join you some nights. Just to make sure
>you're safe, of course."

>

>Noa smiled. Maybe they wouldn't be holding back their relationship TOO much
if he was talking about joining her when she was sleeping. "Maybe...."
>

>
* * * * *
>

>
Gotoh, seeing nothing that required his immediate attention upon returning
>to their station, made his way at his usual leisurely pace up to his office.
He was rather surprised not to see Shinobu waiting for him as his car pulled

>up, given how distressed she had appeared over the phone. When he got to
the office, however, he found out why. She was asleep at her desk.

>

>
'Asleep at your post, eh, Shinobu? What's been happening here, anyway?' he

>thought. He shook her gently.

>

>"Eh? What- did we get another call?" she asked, startled awake.

>

>"No," Gotoh said, smiling at her wistfully. He always felt she looked cute
when she had that sleepy look on her face. "But I figured you might want to

>use my bunk instead of your desk for your nap. And, oh yeah, we're back."

>

>Shinobu, already exhausted, almost collapsed with relief. "Thank god...
things have be utterly insane around here. We've had a record number of

>calls the past week, and while my unit is holding its own the third unit has
fouled up half of its assignments. Ohta and Gomioka are at each other's

>throats, and I'm barely able to keep them apart. There've been an awful lot
of wierd 'malfunctions' in all the vehicles that seem similar to those

>pranks the mechanics squad played on Asuma, and just this morning Gomioka
chewed out Shige about it all. Now, Shige's rattled, Ohta's upset, we've

>got some kind of labor crime spree going on, and everyone's utterly
exhausted. Gomioka and Unit 3 are out on a call right now, and we're stuck

>on standby."

>

>The alarm went off just as she finished, and the phone started ringing on
her desk. Automatically, she picked it up. "Shinobu... yes... yes. We'll

>go out right away. Yes, sir." She hung up and sighed. "Damn... another
call. We've missed several calls because we were down a team, too."

>

>
Gotoh put a hand on her shoulders, keeping her seated. "You don't have to

>go on this one- we'll take it."

>

>She shook her head. "No... relieve Unit 3 when they get back.

They've had
it worse than we have, and... to be blunt, Gomioka's not handling it very

>well. I managed to get a few hours of naptime- I'll be fine, except for the
crick in my neck."

>

>
Gotoh nodded. "Understood," he said formally. He didn't quite approve of

>her decision, but she seemed to be more-or-less alright now that she was
more fully awake. "In the meantime, I think I'll look at your reports..."

>

>
Heading out the door, she nodded. "I knew you would. I've put copies of

>the past week's reports in your chair."

>

>Gotoh went over to his desk, and saw a pile of papers and manila folders
almost two feet high. Frowning, he took the stack and set in on his desk,
>then picked up the first folder and started reading....

>

>* * * * *

>

>"Damn, Shige, you look like hell," Asuma said, eyeing the mechanic
critically. "What's been going on around here?"
>

>
Shige grinned weakly at his favorite couple- Asuma and Noa.
"Quite a bit,
>actually. More calls then in ages, Captain Gomioka's been on my case about
lots of wierd malfunctions, a few cars have been in accidents thanks to the
>weather... lots of things."

>

>Asuma frowned. "What's this about 'wierd malfunctions?'"

>

>Shige sighed. "Remember all of those pranks our mechanics were playing on
you back in January?"
>

>
Asuma laughed bitterly. "Considering I almost got killed by them, it'd be
>kinda hard for me to forget."

>

>Shige nodded. "Yeah. Well, things like that are happening, only worse and
with more frequency. And there don't appear to be any specific targets...
>although Mr. Seiroku seems to be getting the worst of it."

>

>Asuma frowned. "Seiroku? Hmm... didn't he get into a fight at that
softball game?"
>

>
Shige nodded. "Yeah- with Ueki Mashimo from Unit 1. They've apparently had
>a rivalry since their Academy days."

>

>Asuma smirked. "Is that so...."

>

>* * * * *

>

>Gotoh frowned at the records he was reading. Well, skimming- he didn't have
time to make a detailed reading. However, what he saw was pretty
>intriguing. The crime spree seemed technologically oriented, that was
certain. Specifically, labor oriented.
>

>
Among a very few warehouses holding things like computers, televisions, and
>similar electronics, Hishii Industries, a few Shinohara plants, some import
labor repair shops, and a variety of similar locations had been attacked,
>and robbed, and all of these crimes were protected by the presense of a
heavy combat labor- mostly security labors like Saturns, but occasionally
>military grade labors like Brochens or even the heavily armored Doshka's.
Only one of these labors had been captured, and that one

had been traced to
>the warehouse raid towards the end of march that had Units 1, 3,
and
Military Labor Team Raven fighting for their lives.
>

>
On the surface, it looked like someone was selling these
military labors off
>to criminal organizations so they could have heavier firepower
during their
armed robberies. However, the merchandise stolen by
these 'criminal
>organizations' was quite unusual, taken as a whole...

>

>Gotoh selected several of the reports, and made a few photocopies of
them.
Finding a box, he tossed them in their, putting a newspaper
over it and a
>greasy labor replacement part (belonging to a type-97 labor) as
a
paperweight.
>

>
He heard a labor convoy pulling in. Hoping it was Shinobu, he
left the
>office area and stepped into the catwalk overseeing the vehicle
bay.
Unfortunately (in Gotoh's opinion), it was just Gomioka
returning from
>whatever assignment he had been involved with.

>

>Gomioka did NOT look happy when he got out. The first person he saw
was
Shige, and he snapped at the man. Gotoh didn't hear what was
said, but it
>was obviously something the man was very passionate about.
Meanwhile, Ohta
was glaring at Gomioka's back before storming off
himself. Gotoh just
>sighed and shook his head- tempers were obviously flaring. Perhaps
with
some rest, though, things would calm down. Gomioka was
obviously not good
>at handling the stress command provided, it seemed, but he'd had a
rough
time of it. With luck, something would come along to help
him out. Then
>again, the SV2 was notorious for having bad luck.

>

>Shige looked downright crushed at Gomioka's words. The enraged
captain of
unit three, apparently finished with his tirade,
stormed off in the general
>direction that Ohta had been moving. Shige had obviously had a
difficult
time since Sakaki retired. Perhaps he needed some words
of encouragement.
>Or at least a break in the action. Well, he needed someone to run
that box
over to Sakaki, anyway....
>

>
* * * * *
>

>
The rumble of more vehicles coming into the station attracted
Ohta to the
>window. He saw Shinobu's unit, as battle-weary as they had ever
been,
driving into the lot. He also saw Hiromi, heading out to his
garden, while
>Asuma and Noa took grass cutters to trim the grounds. He knew that
meant
Unit 2 was back... which meant they would be resuming normal
rotations,
>soon. In fact, there was probably already a notice posted.

>

>Deciding to risk venturing into the break room to see when he could finally
take a real break, he left his hiding place (while Ohta was anything BUT a
>coward, and while he usually respected his officers, he was not willing to
stand still and just LET an officer stand there and yell at him for no
>reason. Gomioka was going crazy, and he was obviously taking everyone else
with him. Even the seemingly indomitable Seiroku, who had been a favorite
>of the captain and who felt an apparently unquestioning loyalty to the man,
had felt his wrath. Though, usually, the mistakes he made were attributed
>to technical malfunctions, which quickly caused Gomioka to turn his ire onto
the mechanics division.

>

>
The stress of the whole situation was getting to everyone, it seemed. Even

>Shinobu's team was feeling the effect- he'd heard something about someone in
division one named Ueki Mashimo (who Ohta hadn't come into contact with very

>often) had gotten into several fights with his teammates. True, Unit 2 had
been gone for a couple of weeks, but even if they hadn't been there would

>still have been an insurmountable number of calls for several days straight.
Ohta was starting to think a fourth unit might be useful... even though his

>unit was now understaffed, itself.

>

>"YOU!" Ohta heard bellowed at him from behind. He spin around to see his
enraged captain, bearing down at him. "Officer Ohta, WHERE the HELL have

>you been?! We need to talk about your recent performance!"

>

>Ohta froze like a deer in the headlights. "Uh, well...."

>

>"WHY are you CONSTANTLY disobeying my orders? Dammit, I thought you might
actually LISTEN to me if I took the command car in officer Clancy's absense,

>but NO! You-"

>

>"Now wait just one damn minute!" Ohta snapped back, finally too tired at the
constant abuse to stand it any more. "You may have been a decent labor

>pilot, but you've done the worst job of being a command car officer of
anyone I've ever met. I'd RATHER I had Shinshi in command- he was starting

>to catch on to what he was supposed to be doing before Takeo joined our
unit. YOU, on the other hand, are constantly giving me IMPOSSIBLE orders,

>giving them either too fast or too slow, you either give me so little
instruction I have no idea what you're trying to tell me to do or you give

>me so much instruction that I can't follow it all! I've been lucky to
SURVIVE with you as my command car officer, dammit!"

>

>
"Oh, like anyone ELSE has been able to do anything with you," Gomioka

>sneered. "Shinohara was your command, and you wrecked your labor a record
number of times for a type 96. Kanuka and Takeo tried to

deal with you, but
>you've ruined a number of labors under their charge, too. Of all
labor
pilots, you have the WORST record of success. So, maybe you
just aren't a
>good pilot no matter the commander, huh?"

>

>Ohta stiffened. "Sir, I-"

>

>"I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT! You have been the worst influence on my
unit
since your arrival. You may be a DECENT shot on a stationary
target, but
>you've got NOTHING else. I don't see why I keep you as a pilot... in
fact,
I think I'll just relieve you! I've got an adequate
substitute pilot
>waiting in the wings for a shot, and I think I'll just give it to
him.
You're not doing a good enough job to bother with, any more.
Hell, you
>aren't even a good cop- maybe I should-"

>

>"Captain Gomioka, stand down," a calm, carefully controlled voice
broke in
from behind him.
>

>
Gomioka stopped mid-rant, spinning around to see a
frazzled-looking Captain
>Shinobu, clenching her fists to control her own temper. "Uh, ma'am?"
he
said cautiously.
>

>
"I've heard most of your little lecture, Captain, and I should
warn you that
>you don't have a leg to stand on for his removal. As I understand
it, this
latest assignment was blown not by Officer Ohta, but by a
mechanical defect
>in a labor. If you were to relieve him for his performance,
especially
after a lecture like THAT, he would have just cause to
appeal and to file a
>formal grievance against you, which would place a black mark on your
record
which could never be removed." Kanuka puffed. "I'm sorry,
but your whole
>unit has been messing up lately, and it is NOT all Officer Ohta's
fault."

>

>Gomioka was surprisingly humbled. "Uh, yes, Ma'am."

>

>"Now, we're all tired. Thankfully, Gotoh is here, and will be
handling my
calls until further notice. I am on standby, and YOU,
Captain Gomioka, are
>hereby relieved. So, as senior captain of the SV2, I am ordering you
to get
at least 8 hours sleep. You have been making everyone's
life a living hell,
>and whatever issues you have are affecting your job performance. You
have
damn near crushed the maintenance squad's spirit, and that's
hurting MY
>unit. If you are NOT able to calm down by your next shift, let me
know and
I will have YOU relieved."
>

>
Gomioka swallowed. He felt like he'd just been scolded by his
mother. "Uh,
>yes, ma'am."

>

>Shinobu sighed. "Good. Now go. The sooner you get some sleep, the

sooner
I get some sleep."

>

>
* * * * *

>

>
"Curious," Asuma said, going through some files that had just been faxed

>over to him.

>

>Noa, finishing up some back paperwork, looked over at him.

"What?"

>

>"I've been using my connections from all over to track down any information
I can on that Ueki Mashimo guy Shige was telling us about, and to see if

>he's got anything of a record," he explained. "He's gotten into petty
fights and things, but outside of that... well, he's not GOT much of a

>record. His father, however, was arrested once for streetfighting.

His
brother's work, however, is what I thought was so interesting-his brother

>has a mechanic's background."

>

>"So?"

>

>Asuma sighed. Sometimes, he wished Noa was a little less dependant on him
for the detective work. Still, she was good enough to help him out from

>time to time, and that was all that mattered. She certainly had adequate
skills in enough other areas to make them equal partners in the

>relationship.

>

>"Well, if someone's sabotaging all of our equipment, it's either a mechanic,
or someone with mechanical skills. If his brother is a mechanic, isn't it

>possible that Ueki might have picked up some of the training he would need
for this kind of thing?"

>

>
Noa nodded. "Oh, I see now. Still... what's the point? Do you think

>Captains Gotoh or Shinobu don't already know that?"

>

>Asuma frowned. "No... I'm pretty sure they do. Maybe, though, they just
haven't tried to look at that information... well, still, you're right.

>There's not enough info here to do anything. We'll have to continue looking
into things. In the meantime...."

>

>
"Yes?"

>

>
Asuma grinned. "Well, from now until we've found the saboteur, we're going

>to have just one meeting point for all of our 'encounters.' Ever wonder
what it would be like to make out in Alphonse's cabin?"

>

>
Noa laughed, a twinkle in her eye. "Why, Asuma... I've never even thought

>about it. Interesting idea, though-" The siren sounded. "That we're not
going to have time to do right now. Let's get suited up."

```

><br>
><br>Asuma ran out of the room, following her. After they left,
someone else
>came in and started glancing through the papers he had just been
reading.<br>
><br>
>"Hmm," the person said. "This could be... useful."<br>
><br>
>-----<br>
>Next Episode: An intruder is caught at SV2 Headquarters. Takeo meets
up<br>with an old acquaintance- Mr. Richard Wong. And he's no longer
with Schaft
>enterprises... but is that a good thing?<br>

>-----<br>David A. Tatum

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21. Episode 21: An Old Friend Returns

```

From: "David A. Tatum" desaix@anifics.com
><br>To: "David A. Tatum" desaix@anifics.com
><br>Subject: Fw: [MPPatlaborML] [fanfic] Patlabor: Personal Files,
Episode 21
><br>Date: Thursday, August 28, 2003 1:44 PM
><br>My Apologies for the delay. I'd intended to take just 3 months
off back
><br>last year (2002) for the summer to work on something original.
At the
><br>end of that period, however, my father passed away and my family
and I
><br>had to move suddenly. We're only JUST starting to get settled
down, and
><br>I'm still having some problems (including one with the router
connected
><br>to my new cablemodem -- the hardwired firewall is preventing me
from
><br>updating my homepage at the moment, so I haven't been able to

```

fix my
>
e-mail or update my web page in ages)
>
If anyone who does anything related to fanfiction (runs a major

>
archive\review site, writes it, etc.) and will be attending
AnimeUSA
>
(Nov. 21-23 2003 in N. Virginia (Tyson's Corner, technically --
about
>
20 minutes from my new home)), please let me know. I'm
moderating
>
the fanfic panel there, and I'm VERY desperate for panelists --
I've
>
only got two tentatives, and I'd like to have 4 panelists and 4

>
alternates.
>
If I can't get at least two more panelists, I'll have to cancel
the
>
panel...
>
which'd be a shame, because while I've been a panelist myself
several
>
times, this is the first time I've moderated one.
>
Contact me, if interested, at my (relatively) new e-mail of

>
desaix@anifics.com
>
Well, anyway, on to the (much delayed) fic.
>
Enjoy!
>
Patlabor: Personal Files
>
An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum
>
Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...
>
Episode 21: An Old Friend Returns
>
April 13, 2000
>
Asuma sighed. "I'm not sure 'slumber party in the labor' is
quite what
>
I had in mind when I suggested this," he muttered as he snuck
into the
>
kitchen after-hours. He had a mission -- to find the appropriate
snacks
>
and drinks for his and Noa's plan to spend the night in
Alphonse. His
>
only problem with the plan was that they would be staying up
most of the
>
night 'chatting,' before they'd finally be able to go to
sleep... and
>
that they had an unexpected visitor to this night.
>
He had the idea that Noa initially wanted the same sort of
evening he
>
had planned- a little necking followed by a midnight snack and
then...
>
well, since they didn't really need to stay awake for this plan
to work,
>
a long night's sleep. Cuddled together... but fully clothed, in
case
>
something did actually happen.
>
Instead, they'd have to entertain a visitor. Natsume Kawai had

>
overheard them talking about their plans, and had asked if she
could
>
come. Not wanting to reveal that the planned watch was doubling
as a
>
make-out session for the two of them, Noa and Asuma agreed to

let her
>
come. Natsume had also invited both Shige and Joudo, while Noa
(who
>
figured the whole seduction scheme she had planned was now
blown)
>
invited Hiromi. They'd both decided, after their scheme looked
more and
>
more party-like, to invite Takeo along as well, but she wasn't
able to
>
show. She was planning to head downtown to headquarters in the
early
>
morning to take care of some paperwork, and so couldn't afford
the loss
>
of sleep time.
>
And since it was their idea, he and Noa would have to get the

>
entertainment and the food. "It's like something out of high
school,"
>
Asuma continued grumbling to himself. "Or even junior high.
Perhaps a
>
little more adult, though, considering Noa's grabbing some
booze."
>
There'd been some debate as to which of them should go. Asuma
was
>
better able to keep out of trouble if he got caught by his
superiors
>
making the hour-long drive down to the liquor store, but Noa-
being the
>
daughter of a liquor store owner, herself- was better at
selecting it.
>
Asuma hadn't been aware of this particular trait of hers until
they'd
>
started their informal dating, way back before he even realized

>
consciously he was attracted to her. After all, he wasn't
exactly naive
>
when it came to alcohol himself, and so he'd never gotten into
an
>
argument over beer or wine, before, until he'd taken her out to
dinner
>
one night... and discovered just how picky she was about it. She
could
>
drink him under the table, much to his surprise, and her level
of
>
knowledge on drinks was almost as complete as his was on labors.

>
She'd been given a budget, so she likely wouldn't get anything
too
>
outlandish, and she knew that she had to get drinks for six. He

>
doubted, though, she'd go for sake or beer. Especially since
they'd
>
learned that Natsume hated beer.
>
They couldn't get the appropriate foodstuffs for their party at
a liquor
>
store like the one she was going to, however, so it had been his
job to
>
find something. Considering how poorly stocked the SV2's
pantry's
>
usually were, this would be something of a challenge.

>
Opening up the refridgerator, he blinked. There was almost nothing in
>
there except a moldy piece of cheese and an open (and likely flat)
>
bottle of soda. Things weren't usually that low. Then again, they had
>
been unable to 'supplement' their diet for some time. The mechanics had
>
been much too busy to go fishing, the last batch of tomatos Hiromi
>
picked had long since rotted from age, and (perhaps worst of all) no-one
>
had been able to go down to the convenience mart since... well, since
>
before they had left for the Academy. Oddly, only Gotoh's division and
>
the mechanics ever really bothered to keep things stocked in

>
headquarters.
>
Unknown to those in said division, the remaining members of the SV2 were
>
slowly learning the truth of the warning Asuma always gave new members.
>
Daily life was, indeed, a struggle for survival -- and so perhaps the
>
mechanics obsession with fishing and the peculiarities of some members
>
of division 2, such as Hiromi's tomato gardens and chicken farms,
>
weren't quite the eccentricities most outside observers believed them to
>
be.
>
Regardless, that left Asuma with the problem of securing food in a
>
food-scarce environment. To the best of Asuma's knowledge, however, the
>
only place he could possibly find food outside of the kitchen (which
>
further investigation showed was bare save for the standard rice

>
dispensers... and even they were starting to run low) was the officers
>
lounge. A place only Gotoh, Shinobu, Gomioka, and Chief Fukushima were
>
technically allowed to enter.
>
'Well,' he thought casually. 'Doesn't seem as if I've got much choice,
>
now, does it? I'll need a lookout, though....'
>
"Asuma!" Noa's rather loud whisper exclaimed. He spun around, smiling
>
to see her there holding a couple of bags.
>
"Noa! How'd you get back here so quickly?"
>
She shook her head. "Haven't left yet. Your car won't start!"

>
Asuma nodded once in thought. Something had been acting funny in his
>
car ever since he'd come back from his birthday 'celebration,' so this
>
hadn't come as any great shock. Still, it was a problem. "Can

you fix
>
it?"
>
She shook her head. "Not until we get a replacement part. The

>
serpentine belt broke. It's in too bad a shape to even make
temporary
>
repairs, I'm afraid. I doubt even Shige or Sakaki could do
anything for
>
it."
>
Asuma sighed. "Well, we'll worry about that later. The kitchen's
got
>
nothing in it -- we're going to have to raid the officer's
lounge."
>
Noa gaped. "Asuma, you know that's just about the only thing you
can do
>
to get Gotoh mad at us for throwing this little sleepover,
right?"
>
"I know," Asuma sighed. "But it's that or we deal with just
plain
>
boiled rice. We couldn't even season the rice, either -- we're
out of
>
salt, vinegar, sugar, sesame seeds, and all of our usual
spices."
>
Noa pouted in thought. "Actually, I think I know where there's
another
>
stash of food. The engineers won't take too kindly if they find
out
>
we've taken it, though...."
>
"Where?" Asuma asked.
>
"Records room. It's actually one of their porno stashes -- a
bunch of
>
porn tapes, popcorn, and beer. It's not much, but then again we
don't
>
really need much, do we?" Noa asked.
>
Asuma had wanted a little more than that, but he was somewhat
desperate.
>
"Well, beggars can't be choosers. It might solve both our
problems --
>
we can take the beer while we're at it. I'll leave a note
promising to
>
buy new stuff for them when we can -- hopefully, they'll
understand.
>
Now, lead the way."
>
Noa sighed and started leading him to the engineers' stash of
food.
>
This was bound to get the in trouble with them again, and maybe
spark
>
another spate of sabotage towards Asuma... and she'd likely get
caught
>
in the crossfire this time. Why did she always listen to Asuma,
anyway?
>
Oh, right -- she loved him. Well, maybe she was a bit on the
submissive
>
side, too. She'd have to think about that later.
>
Just as they got to the door, a soft crash resonated from inside
the
>
room.
>
Noa paled. "Somebody's in there," she whispered. "We'll have to
come
>
back later!"

>
Asuma frowned. "That's odd. It's after curfew -- the mechanics should
>
all be in bed by now. I know that Shige's more relaxed than Chief
>
Sakaki used to be, but I thought curfew was the one thing he was pretty
>
strict about. Something he said about not wanting people to be asleep
>
on the job...."
>
Noa nodded hesitantly. "Yeah, I remember that. But someone's obviously
>
in there, so we have to leave and come up with some other way to get the
>
snacks."
>
"But who is it who's in there? I mean, even if they did decide to break
>
curfew, I can't imagine one of the mechanics staying up just to take
>
care of some paperwork...."
>
"They could be after the same stuff we are," Noa suggested. "Or it
>
might not even be a mechanic. Captain Gomioka could be filing some
>
papers or something."
>
"True," Asuma admitted. "But I find it highly unlikely. With the

>
increasing rise in labor crimes these past few weeks, even Captain Gotoh
>
is refusing to leave his desk for fear of a call coming in, so all three
>
of them are avoiding their paperwork." He paused. "I wonder if

>
headquarters is going to look at all of this and consider adding that
>
fourth unit they were talking about a while back. Labor crime is rising
>
faster than we can deal with it, it seems."
>
"But it still could be a mechanic getting at the stash before us," Noa
>
reminded him.
>
"Maybe. But I have a funny feeling about this. Come on, let's

>
investigate and see who it is!" Asuma suggested.
>
"But... oh, never mind. You'll convince me to look no matter what I
>
say, just like you always do, won't you?" Noa sighed, exasperated.
>
Asuma smirked at her. "Of course. When was the last time I steered us
>
wrong, anyway?"
>
"Well, there was the time you said-"
>
"Shut up and help me look into this," Asuma growled, obviously

>
pretending to be annoyed. Noa smirked -- she loved it those few times
>
he let her 'win' a teasing session like this.
>
"Yes, dear," she said, kissing him on the cheek before getting serious,
>
and quietly getting into position at the records room doorway. After

>
all this time with him, a lot of it sneaking around, she knew just what
>
he wanted her to do to 'investigate' whoever this supposed intruder was.
>
She watched as Asuma carefully slid the door open, trying to keep it as
>
quiet as possible so as to not disturb whoever was behind it. When the
>
opening was wide enough, Noa slipped in. Asuma tagged along a few
>
seconds later.
>
They didn't immediately find anyone. At first, they wondered if maybe
>
they'd been mistaken -- it certainly didn't appear as if anyone was
>
here. Then, they heard the noise again -- papers rustling somewhere in
>
the vicinity of the personnel files....
>
Using hand signals, Asuma directed Noa to mirror him as they flanked the
>
desks, and raised his hand. Counting down on his fingers from three...
>
to two... to one....
>
They leaped. Noa got their first, tackling the intruder -- who, from
>
their clothes, was obviously not a police employee -- and grabbing her
>
in a wristlock. 'Hmm... those hand-to-hand spars Ohta helped me with
>
when Asuma was hurt last year have really helped,' she thought.

>
"All right, there!" Asuma snapped authoritatively. It was his best
>
'cop' voice, and Noa recognized it as the one he used to give orders
>
which were to be obeyed without question. "Tell us who you are and why
>
you're here!"
>
The person slowly raised their head. "Eh, heh. Hello," they said,
>
wincing slightly.
>
"Momoko!?" Noa and Asuma chorused.
>
* * * * *

>
Sitting around the foot of Alphonse, sipping from a distastefully warm
>
beer and munching on stale potato chips, Noa, Asuma, Natsumi, Shige,
>
Hiromi, and Joudo surrounded Momoko Sakurayama, the star reporter on a
>
variety of news programs who's fate had intertwined with the SV2 on
>
occasion. The would-be romantic rendezvous-turned party had instead
>
become an impromptu interrrogation. At that point, the Unit 2 officers
>
were trying to determine whether or not Momoko deserved to be turned in
>
or not.
>
"Well, your head office wouldn't even give me a press packet on the new

>
team members!" Momoko was explaining. "I've been trying for months to
>
gather information about the new unit, but I haven't been able to get
>
anything on the new people. I was getting desperate!"

>
Joudo blinked. "We aren't really THAT interesting, are we? I mean,
>
we're just police officers. What's so special about that?"

>
"But you're in SV2!" Momoko exclaimed. "SV2! That alone is newsworthy.
>
And ever since the new additions, SV2 has appeared to smooth out most of
>
the rough edges which gave it such a bad reputation. You're still the
>
police unit with the most collateral damage in the world, but at least
>
it's down to a reasonable level, now. We in the press want to know
>
why!"
>
"Well, part of it is that we get enough sleep, now," Asuma muttered out
>
of the side of his mouth.
>
Momoko caught it, however, and immediately whipped out a notepad and
>
scribbled it down. "Get... enough... sle- hey!"
>
"I don't think Asuma would appreciate being assessed that quote," Joudo
>
said, holding the paper he'd just snatched away from her.

>
"Oh, let her have it," Asuma sighed, waving his hand dismissively.
>
"Momoko's one of the few reporters who actually treats us halfway
>
decently, and she's actually helped us out once or twice. She won't use
>
my name, if I'm not mistaken, and maybe it'll help the boys at HQ
>
realize that they need to give us more vacation time."

>
Uncertainly, Joudo handed the pad of paper back to the reporter, who
>
grasped it like a golden treasure and glared at the offending policeman.
>
Quickly finishing her note, she turned back to Asuma.

>
"Thank you," she said, smiling winningly. "Is there anything else you
>
can think of for your improved performance?"
>
"Well, we've always done the job well," Asuma noted. "The collateral
>
damage was mostly inevitable, when you consider the kinds of assignments
>
we've been given. And civilian casualties, as you know, are almost
>
always negligible."
>
Momoko frowned. "That's not what the stats say. New York, Osaka,
>
Kanazawa, Washington D.C., San Francisco, London, Moscow, and

Berlin

>
have all had active patlabor forces for more than two years, and dozens
>
more cities have built up some as well. Yet this particular section of
>
Patlabors has always had the most collateral damage. Are you saying
>
those others haven't had the same problems you have?"

>
"Well, there was the Phantom, and the Griffin, and the war that Kai
>
started, and the whole HOS scare with the Ark, and probably a few other
>
things which seem to have happened uniquely to us. And the patlabor
>
forces in Berlin, New York, and Moscow are all much larger than ours is
>
and so they have an easier time answering calls."

>
"Still," Momoko argued, "That damage isn't what most of the complaints
>
are about. Usually, the complaints were about something more mundane --
>
like breaking up a fight between a couple of drunk labor operators or
>
the like. Every other city with patlabors has the same problems, but
>
rarely is as much damage dealt as it is when your unit in particular is
>
involved. Or at least, that was the case before the new unit was

>
added."

>
"Still, the third unit is old news," Asuma noted. "Just how long have
>
you been trying to get info on them?"
>
Momoko blushed. "Er, well...."
>
Noa got a little worried. Had this reporter discovered her and Asuma?
>
They'd assumed they were safe, since most of the people in SV2 had no
>
interest in ruining their careers by blabbing out about their

>
relationship, but a reporter might find it quite interesting.
Not

>
giving her a chance to answer Asuma's question, she added one of her
>
own. "Um, just how much have you seen, anyway?"
>
"Well, a few juicy bits," Momoko admitted reluctantly. "A few people
>
I've identified have some rather interesting backgrounds. Like, say,
>
that Yamane Seiroku kid? Well, that's not his real name -- or, well, it
>
is, but it didn't used to be. He was born Yamane Gohojo -- the brother
>
of Seiji Gohojo. Who, as you may or may not know, was the Beach House
>
terrorist who murdered Captain Gotoh's wife."
>
Asuma and Noa simultaneously spit out their beer, covering Momoko,

>
Hiromi, Shige, and Joudo. Natsume was covered from the spew by the
>
bodies of Shige and Joudo, who seemed to be especially soaked in it.
>
Everyone turned to glare at the couple, but their dumbfounded expression
>
seemed to be all that was needed to show it was unintentional.

>
Once his mouth started working again, Asuma exclaimed, "He was
>
MARRIED?!"
>
Momoko blinked. "Um, yes, didn't you know? It was his investigation of
>
his wife's death that lead to the police purchasing the first patlabors.
>
I would've thought you knew that."
>
Asuma shook his head. "No. Not a clue."
>
"I knew that it was Captain Gotoh who first lobbied for the creation of
>
a special patlabor division," Noa added, "But I didn't know about him
>
ever being married. He... doesn't seem the type."
>
"And why not?" Gotoh asked, suddenly appearing out of nowhere to
>
intervene in the group. "There's a certain woman I know, now, who I'd
>
marry in a heartbeat if she'd have me." There was no need to explain,
>
as everyone, even Momoko, knew who he was talking about. "So, do we
>
routinely have parties and invite member's of the press along?"

>
"We caught her snooping around the records room," Asuma explained, using
>
his formal voice. "And we've been questioning her since."

>
"I see," Gotoh's voice rumbled. "And just how long has she been
>
snooping, anyway?"
>
"Er... off and on since Unit 3 was formed?" Momoko admitted hesitantly.
>
Gotoh grinned. "Oh! So then it was you who's been going through all my
>
papers for the past several months. I knew we had a spy -- I'm just
>
glad to know it wasn't anyone with malicious intent. Well, no more
>
malicious intent than anyone in the press has towards the SV2."

>
"Hey! I treat you guys fairly!" Momoko protested. "I tell people of
>
your successes just as much as I tell them of your faults! Well...
>
okay, there's that Ohta guy who I occassionally give bad press. But
>
only after he attacked me when I was trying to cover that first major
>
battle with the Griffin!"
>
Noa shuddered at the reminder of perhaps the worst period of her life.

>
She'd almost lost everything to the Griffin -- Asuma, Alphonse, and
>
possibly even her own health. It took months for her to mentally

>
recover from it, and really it took her final defeat of the
thing months
>
later for her to get over it. "Trust me," she said. "It was for
the
>
best that he escorted you out of there. It wasn't a very
pleasant place
>
to be. That thing nearly made me lose everything I value in
life, and I
>
wouldn't be surprised if it would have done the same to you if
you'd
>
stayed there."
>
Momoko looked at Noa blankly. "Huh? What would it have done to
me?
>
After all, who attacks the press?"
>
Asuma cleared his throat. "Do I have to remind you of the time
Noa had
>
to rescue you from --"
>
"Yes, yes, but that was a special case," Momoko sighed, waving
her hands
>
dismissively. "Most of the time, no-one attacks the press."

>
"So," Joudo said, not following much of the conversation and
trying to
>
get it onto something he could join in on. "What are we going to
do
>
with her, anyway? I mean, what she's been doing is a bit
illegal, you
>
know...."
>
Momoko blinked. "Hey, I'm the press! I have the right to be
here!"
>
"Er, no you don't," Asuma noted. "This is government property,
after
>
all, and there are classified documents here. Restricted access
areas
>
and all that, so you're only allowed here if invited."

>
"But... I'm the press!"
>
"Forget it," Gotoh sighed. "Don't worry about it. Ms.
Sakurayama, I
>
think it would be best if you left. I'm not going to bother
asking you
>
not to report anything you've already found out, but if we catch
you
>
again I think we'll have no choice but to arrest you."

>
Everyone was a little startled by Gotoh's pronouncement -- Joudo
because
>
he hadn't expected Gotoh to take it so easy on the reporter,
Hiromi,
>
Noa, and Asuma because he was speaking so harshly to her,
Natsume
>
because she hadn't expected anything to happen at all, and
Momoko
>
because she hadn't even considered the chance that she could be

>
arrested.

>
"Uh, okay," Momoko meekly agreed. "I guess I'll leave now."

>
Gotoh nodded. "I'll escort you out," he said, grabbing her arm as they

>
moved away.

>
Noa frowned, leaning into Asuma. "You think there's something wrong

>
with the captain? He's not acting like he does normally."

>
Asuma pursed his lips in thought. "I dunno," he whispered back.

"Maybe

>
the fact that his late wife was mentioned has something to do with it.

>
I know I get that way, sometimes, when someone mentions my brother...."

>
"Still, he didn't seem upset by that. At least, not at first," Noa

>
noted.

>
"True," Asuma agreed. "I have a sneaking suspicion...."

>
"So, what are you two whispering about?" Natsume cut in, giggling

>
loudly. "Anything fun?"

>
"Er, no," Asuma said. "Just... stuff. So, who's up for another beer?"

>
With that, the party atmosphere returned, and they all spent the night

>
talking about silly things. Asuma was glad when Hiromi finally became

>
the last one other than himself to nod off at around 4 in the morning.

>
While it might not be safe for much with everyone else asleep, he was

>
able to give Noa the customary good-night kiss they'd been giving each

>
other since coming back from the engineers convention all the way back

>
in January. Admittedly, like tonight, he hadn't always been able to

>
give it to her when she was awake to enjoy it, but he nevertheless had

>
to do it for his own peace of mind.

>
Knowing he was going soft towards the girl he loved, and not caring, he

>
gave her that kiss before heading off to sleep -- able to wrap her in

>
his arms as they slept, since everyone was more or less wrapped together

>
in the confined space they chose to have their party. After all,

>
Natsume, Joudo, Shige, and Hiromi were all tangled together, too, and

>
surely no-one would suggest anything about the three of them!

>
It was the best nights sleep both he and Noa had ever had. Even if it

>
didn't last nearly long enough.

>
* * * * *

>
April 14

>
Takeo stepped off of the bus, and started heading towards the

central

>
headquarters building for the police department in Tokyo. To her, it

>
had been a relatively uneventful commute, starting with a dull ride to

>
the nearest bus station via taxi. For some reason, she seemed to be the

>
only person in all of Tokyo who could get a taxi to show up at the

>
Patlabor facility on the reclaimed lands, but she never realized quite

>
how unusual it was until she saw Momoko standing on the street corner at

>
the exit, complaining that she'd been waiting for her own ride for over

>
nine hours. Apparently, she'd called every taxi company in the phone

>
book, but not one of them would come down to the SV2 headquarters

>
regardless of how much money she'd offered them. She'd called one of

>
her co-workers to pick her up, but upon seeing Takeo pick up a taxi of

>
her own so easily the reporter complained loudly about an expose she'd

>
be doing on the lousy service of the taxi cab companies as soon as she

>
got back to her office.

>
Takeo had not been surprised to see Momoko, considering she'd heard all

>
about her capture in the records room during breakfast, but was

>
surprised when she'd offered to share her taxi at least as far as the

>
nearest bus station. However, it appeared the reporter didn't want to

>
'stand up' the man who'd already been dispatched to pick her up, and

>
Takeo could understand that.

>
Takeo mused on the situation back at SV2. Apparently, things had gotten

>
out-of-hand in the past few weeks. Gomioka was going crazy and taking

>
everyone he could with him, the mechanics were worked nearly to death

>
trying to deal with tiny bits and pieces of sabotage, and labor crime

>
had increased almost a hundredfold in the past three weeks -- what

>
normally was just one crime every week or so had turned into multiple

>
major incidents on a daily basis.

>
And her unit was nowhere to be found in that period. Or, more

>
precisely, her unit was in Fuji working with the Academy and unavailable

>
to help. That said, interesting developments were happening there as

>
well. She'd let herself be goaded by the American woman again, dammit,

>
and it lead to her starting to develop an affinity for teaching.
Maybe
>
she'd apply for the Academy... sometime after the next academic
year,
>
however. Maybe she'd try and aim to succeed Kanuka, assuming
there was
>
an adequate replacement for herself in the upcoming students. It
would
>
give her a chance to work one-on-one with Captain Gotoh's niece,
who
>
she'd found to be a rather brilliant young woman. By the time
she
>
finished her training in three years, she'd probably be the most

>
heavily-sought after rookie patrol officer in Japan... and she
had a
>
funny feeling she knew who would get her.
>
Furthermore, Unit 2 was also disrupted by what seemed to be a
growing
>
tension between it's two brightest stars -- Asuma and Noa. It
wasn't
>
that they were growing apart, or showing visible signs of having
had any
>
recent fights or anything. Rather, it appeared as though they
were
>
having a rather difficult time maintaining the cover which gave
their
>
relationship plausible deniability. Takeo was slightly worried
for
>
them -- she'd done a personnel records update, recently, and had
found
>
in her background investigation something which could be awfully

>
damaging if it were known to the public. Apparently, a dowry had
been
>
arranged between the Izumi's and the Shinohara's. Takeo hadn't
been
>
aware the relationship had reached that point, but she wondered
with
>
this new piece of information just how long the couple were
planning to
>
stay in the force. Her guess was, within a couple of years or so
--
>
likely whenever it was Alphonse was finally declared obsolete by
the
>
police hierarchy and retired from active duty -- they would both
resign,
>
get married, and take over the reins in Shinohara Heavy
Industries...
>
given that they'd own it when they got married. Takeo hadn't
wanted to
>
hasten that departure, however, and so quickly did what she
could to
>
cover their tracks. If someone knew to look for it, they'd
probably
>
still find the same evidence she'd found, but it was unlikely
someone
>
would be able to see the same documents she had anymore unless
they were
>
specifically looking to see what communications were being made

between
>
their parents -- which would not be something a routine
background check
>
would likely do.
>
However, there was even yet another bit of drama slowly
developing in
>
her unit, and Takeo wasn't sure what to make of it. Asuma and
Noa were
>
practically joined at the hip, Hiromi always seemed to her to be
either
>
attached or interested in someone -- who, she hadn't discovered,
yet --
>
and Gotoh had that blatantly obvious not-quite-one-sided thing
for
>
Shinobu, but the members of her own team were safely unattached.
For
>
the moment. However, it looked like something interesting was
starting
>
to develop between Natsume Kawai and Joudo Ishikawai... and the
new head
>
of the mechanics unit, Shige. At any rate, the romantic triangle
--
>
which Takeo had thought she'd seen evidence of earlier but
couldn't be
>
certain -- appeared to be taking on a new twist. Recently,
instead of
>
being completely oblivious to everyones attention like she had
been
>
since joining their unit, Natsume seemed to be taking a notice
in her
>
two suitors as well. No-one could possibly know but Natsume,
herself,
>
but her actions seemed to indicate that she was gradually
becoming aware
>
of things. For example, when she'd demanded that both Shige and
Joudo
>
dance with her at Chief Sakaki's retirement 'party,' she had
rejected
>
all the other potential dance partners.
>
Much more blatant, however, was the scene she witnessed when she
came
>
down the steps that morning to see the sight of several sleeping

>
officers at the foot of Alphonse. Noa and Asuma were cuddled up
in such
>
a cute way it was almost sickening, but nevertheless they could
still
>
maintain their 'plausible deniability' thanks to the other
members of
>
the party.
>
From the wrinkles in the sheets, Takeo could tell that Hiromi,
Shige,
>
Joudo, and Natsume had all been bundling up together when they
went to
>
sleep that night. Somehow, Hiromi had detached himself from the
bunch,
>
and maneuvered his way into a little ball on his own. Natsume,
however,
>
had somehow managed to grab each of her two suitors and maneuver
them so

>
that each was resting their head on her chest. It was a rather

>
compromising position -- or would have been, had it not been so obvious

>
that none of them had started out sleeping that way.

>
Regardless, it appeared obvious now that everyone in Special Vehicles,

>
Section two, unit two, had a romance going on. Everyone except for

>
Takeo, that was. She seemed to be the lone fish out, free from any

>
romantic entanglements at all. What a bitter pill to swallow that was.

>
She hadn't made a serious consideration towards a romantic partner since

>
Hong Kong and...

>
Takeo was startled out of her thoughts, however, by a high-speed

>
collision with another pedestrian. She stumbled back, reassembled her

>
thoughts, and looked up to apologize.

>
"I'm sorry, I wasn't watching where I- YOU!" She exclaimed.

>
Looking stunned himself, Richard Wong, Takeo's one-time lover and the

>
mastermind behind several major labor crimes over the years, could

>
barely articulate anything, either.

>
"YOU!" Wong echoed himself, unable to believe his eyes either.

>
It was a standoff for a few seconds as both couldn't help but stare at

>
each other in disbelief. Who would have guessed that they would run

>
into each other on the streets of Tokyo like this? Neither was quite

>
sure what to do.

>
Richard finally relaxed somewhat, and smiled at her. "Well, this is a

>
pleasure, I must say. What are you doing here in town, anyway?"

>
That broke Takeo from her trance, as well. Reaching into the rear

>
pocket of her uniform, she pronounced, "I'm sorry, but I'll have to

>
place you under arrest immediately, Richard. I can't afford to slip up

>
this time, so we can't talk."

>
Wong's smile remained on his face, however. "Come on, now -- we both

>
know that I'll escape if you try. I don't have anything to do today

>
which cannot be postponed -- surely you have a moment as well. What do

>
you say we go have a brunch or something at a local cafe? I haven't

>
eaten, yet, today, and I'm starving."

>
Takeo's eyes narrowed. "What are you trying to pull, here? I'm trying

>
to arrest you, dammit!"

>
He sighed. "Do you want me to explain exactly how I can escape you, no

>
matter what you try, or will you just agree to sit down and talk. It's

>
been ages, and the last time we met was a rather... distracting time.

>
I'd love a chance to try and catch up -- I mean, I bet you don't even

>
know that I'm not working for Shaft any more!"

>
That brought Takeo up short. Thinking about it, she realized that he

>
was right -- there probably wasn't a reasonable way to arrest him

>
unsupported and on her own like this. He was a master of disguise, a

>
much more athletic man than his appearance implied, and a brilliant

>
escape artist. She was athletic and fairly skilled in a number of

>
areas, as well, but in a public place like a crowded sidewalk, it was

>
unlikely those skills would help her to capture him on her own.

>
Besides, she still loved him, despite knowing what he had done. And she

>
was legitimately interested in what he had to say. Her paperwork could

>
wait. She just wanted to renew a license, and she had more than a month

>
to do it in, anyway. She might even manage to deal with it after their

>
talk.

>
"Okay," Takeo finally said.

>
"Okay?" Wong replied, clearly not expecting that answer. "You mean, you

>
will?"

>
She nodded. "Yes. I'd love to hear all about what happened between you

>
and Shaft. I knew you weren't exactly in favor with the management, but

>
I always heard that you were too valuable for them to fire. And I know

>
you couldn't just leave them... or if you could, then you abandoned me

>
in Hong Kong for no reason."

>
"No, it was kind of a... mutual agreement that we go our separate ways,"

>
Wong explained, taking her arm and guiding her down the road. "I hated

>
them and wanted to leave. They hated me and wanted to live. When I

>
managed to threaten them with their deaths if they refused to let me go,

>
I got my release."

>
Takeo sighed. Why wasn't she surprised? "I see. Shame you couldn't

>
manage that a few years ago, when it might have mattered to me."

>
Wong nodded. "I agree. That was perhaps my biggest regret out of

all

>
the things I've done for Shaft." He paused. "I doubt I'll ever be able

>
to clear my name enough so that I can risk trying to make it up to you.

>
You'd pretty much have to arrest me before we could reconcile, right?"

>
"Well, if you did something to get yourself a full pardon, I might

>
consider trying things again." Takeo paused, smiling bitterly. "I've

>
been so lonely without you. But I don't think I can deal with you, now.

>
It's too painful... even this conversation we're having now is

>
bittersweet."

>
They entered a small coffee shop and took their seats. Richard placed

>
an order for both of them, remembering Takeo's preferences much to her

>
surprise, before he responded.

>
"Well, my new employer is trying to see if he can do something to clear

>
my record," Richard noted abruptly. "He's a good man. I believe your

>
Captain Gotoh knows him -- in fact, I think he is, or at least was, on

>
my boss's payroll."

>
"Oh, really? Who is he -- I might know him," Takeo said, surprised.

>
People powerful enough to pardon the man behind the Griffin and who knew

>
Captain Gotoh didn't number all that many, as far as she knew.

>
"His name wouldn't mean anything to you," Richard said, waving her

>
question off. "Suffice it to say, he was someone who needed a security

>
officer who understood labors and labor development as well, and I was

>
perfect for the job. He's working on a plan which should wipe out my

>
criminal record, too, so I'm extremely grateful to him."

>
Takeo half-smiled. "I've seen your record -- he'd pretty much have to

>
be the prime minister to do that. Then again, even he might have

>
trouble -- if we were in the days of the Shoguns, then maybe one of them

>
might have enough power, but...."

>
"Well, he seems to think he can do it," Wong said.

>
"If he does," Takeo said slowly, "And if you're sincere about staying

>
within the law, call me. I... I loved you, you know. I might be able

>
to again, some day."

>
Richard froze, then nodded slowly. "I will. You know, I lo--"

>
Takeo immediately stood up, not allowing him the time to finish

his

>
sentence, and checked her watch hand -- cursing herself for not

>
remembering her watch today. "Oh, my -- I'm going to be late.

I've got

>
to go, bye!" Without even glancing at him, she retreated...

before he

>
said something that would really hurt.

>
Wong watched her go with a sigh. "Well," he muttered to himself.

"That

>
was interesting. But I've got a job to do."

>
He started to get up when his cell phone rang. Smiling in surprise, he

>
pulled it out. "Utsumi," he answered it.

>
The other end of the phone said something which made him smile.

"Ah,

>
good, so our young friend is here. Well, tell Bud that level four is

>
coming soon. Now, don't call me again -- I've got a meeting with our

>
little spy, and I'm already late."

>
He stepped off into the bathroom of the little cafe. He reached the

>
third stall door and knocked on it in a particular sequence.

>
"Good," a muffled voice, disguising its owner, said from the other side.

>
"You're finally here. I was about to leave."

>
"It wouldn't have been a good idea," Wong noted. "Takeo Kumagami was

>
out in the cafe, eating breakfast. You would have been seen."

>
"Doesn't matter at this point," the voice on the other side said. "I'm

>
pretty sure this'll be my last report -- I doubt I'll be able to get

>
into the records again before the game starts."

>
"Well, let me have it," Wong said impatiently. "I haven't got all day,

>
and the bathroom is not my favorite place to loiter."

>
"Here," the voice said as a small packet slid under the stall.

>
"There're some records, a copy of the personal journal of Captain Gotoh,

>
and a copy of an Ingram movement disk. Not Ms. Izumi's,

>
unfortunately -- she's guarding her labor too heavily."

>
Wong grinned. "Thank you. That'll just have to do. Phase one begins

>
on May Day. You should hold off on your part of this until the third,

>
however. Good luck, and when we see each other again... well, let's

>
just say we'll be well on our way to having control of our own destiny.

>
I'll make sure the boss gets these, you just get into position. We

>
don't have long now."

```

><br>-----
><br>Next Episode: Things start really heating up as we lead into the
season
><br>finale of Patlabor: Personal Files! The animosity between
Gomioka and
><br>Ohta takes a new turn, while the Griffin makes a new first
strike. (And
><br>I may get around to doing one of the OAVs -- Gotoh's OAV --
since all
><br>that I needed to reveal before writing that one has now been
revealed)
><br>-----
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22. Episode 22: Prelude to War

Patlabor: Personal Files

An Episodic Patlabor Fanfic by David A. Tatum

Disclaimer: Insert legal junk here...

Episode 22: Prelude to War

April 30, 2000

"Gotoh! Call for you!" was an announcement often heard in the Academy halls in the most recent session. Mahoko Gotoh was often seen with a brilliant smile on her face for hours after such an announcement was made, and that smile proved to be quite contagious. So, when the usual shout went up that her uncle in the SV2 was calling for her, most passerbys couldn't help but grin at the frantically sprinting

girl darting over to the phones.

"Uncle Gotoh! Hi!" she cried into the receiver breathlessly. "I was wondering if you'd manage to call today. How are things?"

"I always find time to check up on my favorite niece," came the reply. "We've been rather busy these past few weeks, however."

"I think you've only mentioned it every day since you left," Mahoko deadpanned. "So I don't know why that doesn't surprise me."

"How is Kanuka doing, by the way?" he replied, changing the subject.

"Professor Clancy? Well, she's toned down a bit since Lt. Kumagami left... and trust me, it's helped a lot. She's still as tough as nails and she still knows her stuff, but she's no longer quite so... outrageous... in her lectures." Mahoko grinned, glancing around to make sure said professor wasn't around. "Kumagami must have provoked her or something."

"It's a friendly rivalry," Gotoh noted. "That occasionally sparks less than friendly behavior. I've told you about the unit vacation, right?"

"Yes!" Mahoko laughed. "Poor Officer Ohta! I can't believe they did that to him."

"Have you been following the news, lately?" Gotoh asked when she finished laughing.

An outside observer would have had a hard time noticing it on her face, but Mahoko's smile froze the moment she heard that phrase.

"No, I'm afraid not," she replied, revealing nothing.

"Ah. Well, I suggest you talk to Kanuka about it - there's something she'll be interested in. Gomioka has been angling for a while to replace Ohta with Seiroku. Well, he finally managed it this time - Ohta screwed up big time."

"When?" Mahoko asked again, visible strain in her voice.

"I suggest you talk to her today or tomorrow," Gotoh answered. "I doubt it'll be news any more if you wait much longer than that. Ohta is upset, but I expect we'll see what Mr. Seiroku is capable of very soon. I will note that the rather busy period of activity we've had, recently, has been absent these past twenty-four hours."

Mahoko swallowed nervously. "I'll talk to her right away."

"Good," Gotoh said. "I suppose I should let you go, now, huh?"

"Yeah," Mahoko said. "I... have things I need to do."

That day, Mahoko Gotoh's smiles didn't light up the hallways of the academy as usual. Instead, a very troubled look filled her face, and a sense of uneasiness went up among the cadets.

"Uncle Sake!" came the call from the foyer. Sakaki, fiddling with a hydraulic line in one of the Type 96 labors parked in his house's courtyard, sighed. He really wished that girl would drop that embarrassing nickname.

"What?" he called back gruffly.

"Someone here to see you from Special Vehicles."

"Is it Shige? Send him on back here..."

"It's not Shige," a different voice answered him. Sakaki, his face partially hidden behind his mirror shades, raised an eyebrow. Managing a stopping point on his work, he turned around.

"Officer Ohta?" he asked, letting his surprise just barely carry through in his voice.

"Not 'officer' any more," Ohta sighed. "Gomioka has me on suspension, with pay, 'pending an investigation' into my performance as a labor pilot. That investigation has yet to be scheduled, so Gotoh didn't feel too bad about asking me to deliver a package for him."

"Indeed," Sakaki mused, taking the package Ohta was carrying. There was a letter strapped to the top, which he immediately started opening. "Did he have any other messages?"

"Just that I was supposed to wait until you were ready to reply," Ohta said.

Sakaki scanned the letter and tensed. "Did he, now? Well, I don't think I'll have a reply for him for a few days, but it looks as if he was anticipating that. I think we'll have to find a room for you, here, for a few days."

Shinobu shook her head as she spied the labor bay, seeing the same sight once again. Entering the offices, she walked over to her fellow Captain Gotoh.

"Excuse me, but you wouldn't happen to know why your entire unit is camped out, asleep, under the feet of Alphonse again?" she asked. "They've been doing that for the past two weeks, you know."

"They didn't consult me about it," Gotoh noted. "They seem to be having fun, though."

"They didn't 'consult' you? Well, do you have any guesses?"

Gotoh shrugged, looking around. Gomioka was absent, but that was usually the case. He'd grown increasingly anti-social, and his latest statement benching Ohta and suspending him from the force was done without explanation. Neither Shinobu nor Gotoh had been able to get the story out of him, but from what Ohta and the other officers in Unit 3 were saying it appeared as if there was once more a conflict between the two regarding his taking the command car. Shinobu had been feeling more and more embarrassed for having recommended him to be made captain, but it was too late for her to do anything about it. Gomioka had gone over her head, straight to Fukushima, and hadn't

been showing his face around the office much at all.

"I have a few, but I don't know if I should mention them or not."

Shinobu raised an eyebrow, believing him to be talking about Noa and Asuma's not-quite-as-secret-as-they'd-wish relationship, but she couldn't see how the nightly parties could be involved in that.

"I know we officially avoid noticing certain things about the dynamics of Unit 2 on purpose," Shinobu began, "But surely you could mention something, unofficially, if you suspected it."

Gotoh blinked at her. "What are you talking about?"

"I assumed... ah, perhaps not. I'd like to know what it is you think shouldn't be mentioned, in this case. I promise I won't discuss it with anyone else, if you don't want me to."

The other captain sighed. "Well, I suppose I should let you in on it. I've had some suspicions about certain things for a while." He unlocked a cabinet in his desk and pulled out a file. Staring at it for a moment, he sighed. "Here, take a look. I think you'll find it... enlightening."

Shinobu glanced through it. Mostly, it was the summaries of various crime reports over the past several months. Most notable on it were her own action against the theft of a large number of military labors and the robbery of the Quartermaster's Corps. which Gomioka's unit had intervened in. Attached to the later was a document she had yet to see - the summary, provided by Shinohara Heavy Industries, of the stolen property from their government liason offices in that incident, as provided by Asuma.

Then there were some unofficial reports, as well - Takeo Kumagami had given him an off-the-record statement of her meeting with Richard Wong, which Shinobu had only been mildly aware of. Highlighted on the document was a claim by Mr. Wong that a former boss of Gotoh's was working on securing him a pardon... something which struck a cord in her, as well.

Finally, there was a series of messages from Momoko Sakurayama, the reporter. A possible exchange of sources, perhaps, as most of the messages meant nothing to Shinobu but seemed to deal with an investigation Gotoh was working on. However, one entry was highlighted. An entry which caused Shinobu to gasp aloud.

"Why haven't I heard about this, before?" she asked. "This is big news, especially for us, and it hasn't appeared at all in the press. If a reporter had it, then-"

"There's been a gag order on certain pieces of news, recently. No explanation. That's only one piece of information - another is that Bud Reynard has been, ah, removed from his school."

Shinobu's eyes narrowed. "So... what does all of this mean?"

"I'm afraid we're in for a bit of a situation... and soon. I sent Ohta off-site, and Kanuka is in position with a working labor three from my unit. I had plans to take care of Alphonse, but Noa and Asuma

- whether they found out on their own, like I suspect, and took the initiative on their own or whether there's some other reason they're camping out there - are dealing with it themselves."

"You've done nothing for MY unit," Shinobu noted wryly.

"I've made some arrangements, but there's nothing I can do for your people specifically," Gotoh sighed. "I don't know them well enough. None of my people went into your unit - you're the only person who I could do anything with, and I couldn't talk with you about it until today."

"Why not until today?" Shinobu asked.

Gotoh grimaced. "Because today, the crime spree has stopped. Which means things are going to start happening, and soon..."

There was a knock on the door, and Kanuka looked up. "Come in."

Mahoko Gotoh paused at the entrance before slowly walking into the office. "Professor Clancy," she acknowledged, nodding her head respectfully as her hands were full. "I... I've got something for you."

"Surely you haven't finished that research paper already? You simply must stop finishing assignments so quickly - you're making the rest of the cadets look bad!" Kanuka teased.

Mahoko visibly relaxed. "Nothing so mundane, I'm afraid. Uncle - er, Captain Gotoh asked me to deliver something to you the moment he gave me a certain coded message. I got that message today, and so here it is."

Kanuka raised an eyebrow as she accepted the parcel. "CAPTAIN Gotoh sent this, eh? Hmm, I wonder..." With a quick perusal of the documents, her face grew more and more grim. "Are you aware of the contents of this?"

"The gist of it, anyway," Mahoko admitted. "He let me know what it was all about when he gave it to me."

Kanuka nodded. "Okay. Pass the word - all trainees to the training labors. We're going on a survivalist field trip for a few days."

May 1, 2000

"A May Day military labor drill?" complained Sergeant Chuuichi Iguchi of JSDF Labor Team Falcon. Piloting one of the lightweight Mitsubishi 'Simon' scouting labors, Chuuichi wasn't exactly pleased to be engaged in exercises after dark. Especially not when his labor had to go up against the much heavier grade AV-99 Helldivers (the military variant of the Ingram) of Team Raven.

"We have to keep in practice somehow," Raven team's Captain Fuwa coughed back. She was in overall command of all four teams that day, and took it to heart. "Now, gentlemen, to your labors."

The drill began fairly normally. Team Falcon in the Simons, Team Raven in the Helldivers, Team Seagull in the submersible Amazons

produced by Fuji Heavy Industries, and the Kawasaki Bakers (the heavy eight-legged tank-like labors based on the failed X-10 project to compete with the Russian Doshka's) of Team Albatross all had successes in the drills. As usual, Team Raven showed itself to be the best pilots in the best labors during the one-on-one matches, but each team managed at least one victory in the team competitions.

"Time out!" Chuuichi called, two hours into the drills.

All four teams paused in their actions. "Is there a problem, Sergeant?" Fuwa asked.

"Receiving a report from Colonel Atsuo Tobe," Chuuichi explained. "He reports that Team Sparrow, on guard patrol, has lost contact with home base. He sent out Teams Condor and Heron to scout out the area, and lost contact with them as well - no explanation. He now asks that we investigate, but be on our guard."

Captain Fuwa tensed. Three units, completely out of contact without any warning? Just what was going on, anyway?

"Acknowledged. Team Falcon, set a perimeter. Team Albatross, extended diamond formation. All other labors, close formation inside Team Albatross' guard. We'll move in cautiously."

"Yes, ma'am!" came several replies at once.

As the well-trained unit it was, the sixteen JSDF military labors moved as a unit, with efficiency and skill. Or rather, it did as long as Fuwa could follow it - once they entered the patrol area where the other labors had disappeared, all of her sensors suddenly blanked out.

"Shit! I've lost all sensors. I'll have to fall back. Does anyone read me?" She paused. "Oh, hell."

With a flick of a switch, her chair lifted out so that she'd at least have some visibility as she moved. What she saw as she came up nearly made her wish she didn't - from the wreckage of labors, including the obsolescent Type-97 Samsons and at least four other Hellfires, she could see that Teams Sparrow, Heron, and Condor were all in pieces, literally, and it looked as if Sergeant Chuuichi's Simon had been shredded. And doing the demolishing, she could see, were two Doshka's, four Brochen's, and a labor she never expected to see. The telltale black wings proved to belong to the Griffin.

"Oh... hell."

In the bloodshed that followed, all sixteen military labors - including Captain Fuwa's Hellfire - were destroyed. One final act of defiance managed to take down the last of the four Brochen's they faced, but the two Doshka's and the Griffin were the real heavy firepower in the first place.

As Fuwa faded to unconsciousness in the wreckage of her broken labor, her mental math told her that between the destruction of all seven teams of military labors, almost one quarter of the entire JSDF contingent of labors was lost. To only four enemy labors destroyed.

If this really was a war, like she thought, they were in big trouble.

"Boss! We've got a package for you!" the aide-de-campe for Hanafuji Yakuza faction chief Naoya Fujioka cried. "No return address."

Naoya looked up. "Eh? Have the screeners checked it, yet?"

"Yes, we're fairly certain it's not a bomb, whatever it is. Pretty heavy, though."

Naoya sighed. "Well, bring it here. Might as well see what's going on."

The package was about the size of a shoe box, and the postmark seemed to indicate it came from the reclaimed lands which Babylon Project's phase one experiments had made available for development, but other than that there was nothing remarkable about the package. A letter was attached on the outside, which Naoya promptly opened.

"Returning some things you gave me for safekeeping. Don't use them - I'll be by to reclaim them in time."

There was no signature, and the letter itself was typed giving no indication as to who sent it. It was all quite mysterious, but nevertheless Naoya felt like he should know what this package contained without having to open it.

Shrugging, he decided there were better uses of his time than solving riddles when there was a much simpler way of getting his questions answered. With a decisive rip, he tore open the package and lifted the lid of what was, in fact, a shoe box wrapped with paper.

"Labor movement disks?" he muttered aloud, surprised. He pulled them out, and sure enough, every single labor movement disk he had sent to the care of SV2 and Captain Gotoh were in the package.

He had continued collecting labors, and now had about thirty labors, but he always sent the movement disk straight to the police captain. His collection, while constantly kept in working condition, were for show only. He remembered how to drive them - in fact, he secretly kept a single movement disk for one of the farming labors just to keep in practice - but he certainly didn't need all thirty disks! Nor had he asked for them. He looked at the letter again.

The word 'safekeeping' seemed to be a little bolder than most of the others on the page. Emphasized slightly, as it were. That was very curious, now, wasn't it?

Well, he actually liked the people of SV2. Anything he could do to help them out would be a pleasure.

"Call in our labor maintenance team. Check all the batteries," he ordered to his nearest flunky. "Make sure they're all fully charged from now on."

"Yes, boss!" the man cried, immediately running off.

Maybe he'd better up his personal training schedule a bit, as

well.

Momoko Sakurayama hesitated. She and Captain Kiichi Gotoh had been secretly exchanging information for months, now, and she'd seen much of what he had about what was coming. Whenever she even tried to write about it, or to comment on it during her TV gig, her superiors would nix the story, saying that there wasn't enough proof (which was bullshit, in her opinion - she and many of the other reporters had published stories on much less data than she'd had) or that 'it was a message the editors didn't want our papertelelevision station to report.' Or, in other words, someone up top was being pressured to keep the story quiet. By who was a real question she wished she had an answer for, but she supposed it didn't matter anymore. Given what she'd just heard from her contacts in the military, she wouldn't be able to do anything about it before the story got too big for her editors to continue to ignore it.

Thirty military labors, destroyed in minutes. And not just the older models like the Samsons, but also a large number of Hellfires and Bakers - the backbone of the military's labor force - and the brand new Simons and Amazons as well. The Simons, the military's response to the high-speed threat posed by the Griffon, were wiped out in a matter of moments - they were no match for the vehicle they were built to counter. Nothing else was quick enough to fight it. The Griffon's appearance, itself, was astounding - one hadn't been seen since Noa Izumi's encounter in October of 1999. It was last seen self-destructing after a rather remarkable battle... which no-one had on tape, but that was probably for the best. Gotoh had explained his reasoning to her, and while she felt a LITTLE used, he had given her a good story as compensation.

That was the channel through which they'd continued discussions. Ever since she was 'discovered' and 'thrown off the base,' though, updates were harder and harder to get to each other. Gotoh had given her one new tool to use in gathering information, however - the signal of an old wiretap a certain Yakuza from the Daina group had used on the SV2 which had never been removed. With it, she could hear any phone conversation going to and from the headquarters, and thanks to that she had learned of his suspicions already. The phone call to his niece was an obvious code - he already knew things were coming to a head. He probably didn't know quite how close things were, however.

Just as she was about to call him, the crackling of a bit of static warned her that someone was calling out from the SV2. Quickly, she switched the audio of her wiretap's receiver from speaker to headphone, and decided to listen in secretly.

"Hello?" a deep male voice she'd never heard before answered, obviously on the other end.

"It's me," another voice, one she recognized as belonging to one of the new rookies, answered. Suddenly, there was something in the background from that end, and some sounds of shifting seemed to indicate the owner of the voice was turning his head. "Oh, captain," the distant voice in SV2 headquarters answered. "Yeah, I'll get right on that after this call to my grandparents. Yes, sir, I'll make it short. Thank you, sir!"

"Is he gone?" the deep male voice answered.

"Yeah, now he is. Look, I can't talk long. I've managed to do a significant amount of sabotage, and I've placed small explosives in various locations. I even managed to find a scapegoat, although they'll discover that he's innocent soon. The only labor I haven't been able to touch is Alphonse - er, Unit two labor one. For some reason, some of Unit Two came up with the idea that the Ingram's feet would be a great place to hold some kind of nightly party. All other heavy equipment outside of that labor and my own Zero, which I'll have out of here tomorrow night, will be ruined by the explosions. You can move in on the morning of the third."

"Good. We'll have someone standing by to guard your escape."

"I've gotta go, now - the Captain's waiting for me, and I don't want to be discovered. This'll be our last communication - I'm taking the phones off-line in ten minutes."

"Good luck. We've already had one major success - the pride of the military was already taken out, and the rest is in confusion. The Kanazawa unit has already been wiped out without getting word out. The third will be the last day any of us will have to work in secret, so don't worry too hard about your cover."

Two clicks indicated the phones were hung up, but Momoko could only sit there in shock.

'Kanazawa's been taken out? The military is being stopped? Why the hell are they worried about SV2, anyway, if they can do THAT?' She paused. 'And how am I going to get word to Captain Gotoh, now?'

Author's note:

The (new) labor names for the military labors mentioned above are a bit of an in joke for me, but since they ARE an in-joke, I figure I should explain them. 'Ingram' is the name of a major wholesale book distributor (one you may not have heard of if you aren't in the industry, however). So, all the new names ("Simons" for Simon and Schuster, "Amazons" for and "Bakers" for Baker and Taylor (the British-based equivalent of Ingram, I believe)) are also major book distributors. The manufacturers all are, or have in the past, built airplanes for the JSDF according to Janes All the Worlds Aircraft 1997-98 (I have more recent copies, but this was the most convenient one to reach).

Season Finale... No New Episodes Until next 'Season.' I'm not entirely sure what I'll do to show this as a season break - I make make major revisions to older episodes (and maybe, finally, REPLACING the Lost Episode with a new Episode 07) or I may finally write up one or two of the dozen or so OAVs I've planned. Regardless, something's going to happen between now and season 2. (Sorry, ladies and gentlemen - that does mean more delays. Urgh.

Next Episode: In the Season 2 Premiere for Patlabor: Personal Files, the SV2 has to deal with the results of a traitor in their midst.

End

file.